**Disentangling Educational Care and Domination: The Sociopolitics of Race and Detroit Youths' Participation in a Summer Mathematics Program**

by

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the youth, parents, community members, and colleagues of McClymonds High School, Far West High School, and Eastside College Preparatory School. Individually and collectively, you transformed my understandings of education, of community, and of love. May this dissertation reflect my commitment to our mutual liberation.

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**Abstract**

Various stakeholders—from local families and youth to venture philanthropists—have engaged community-based education (CBE) programs as sites for pursuing their educational aims beyond the institutional constraints of public schools. Scholarship on CBE programs has shown how these spaces can offer unique institutional and organizational contexts for negotiating the meanings and operations of care and racial equity in education. Researchers have also documented that, despite their existence outside of school institutions, CBE spaces are still interactive within dominant power structures, including race, class, and gender. In this dissertation, I inform the debate about the possibilities and perils for pursuing racial equity and justice through CBE programs by examining the sociopolitics of care in one such program. Using critical qualitative methodology, I conducted an ethnographic case study of the sociopolitics of care, race, and education in the Kids Mathematics Coalition (KMC), a summer program attended by middle- and high school-aged youth of color in Detroit, Michigan. KMC explicitly bills itself as being built around a central philosophy of "loving and believing in kids" and also regularly touts its successes boosting Detroit kids' mathematics achievement scores.

While CBE programs continue to be sites where individuals and communities navigate racism and other systems of privilege and oppression, educators and researchers across contexts have taken up *critical care praxis* as a framework for joining educational theories and practices that prioritize social justice across individual and systems-level interactions (Ginwright, 2010; Wilson, 2015, 2016). Similarly, education researchers have identified instructional interactions as sites for potentially disrupting dominant systems of privilege and oppression. KMC, as a

mathematics program, holds particular meaning as a site for investigating programmatic and instructional discourses and youths' negotiations of care, race, and power in education. Care—as a matter of interpersonal relations, but also as a resource and a politics—is one dimension in which we can observe the interactions between macro-level systems of privilege and oppression and local education contexts and actors. In this study, I explore the sociopolitics of care by investigating how participants in KMC understand and enact care with regards to education and race. Included in this larger discussion, I explore how participants' conceptions of care relate to instructional practices and dynamics in the program, including around mathematics teaching and learning. Lastly, I explore how youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their own educational experiences. Using a conceptual framework that brings together critical care theories, community-based education research, and theories of instruction, I analyze in-depth interviews with KMC participants and participant-observation data from my time researching the program.

Data show that KMC advances an understanding of care that privileges white paternalistic and abstractly liberal perspectives of race and education. Moreover, data show that common instructional practices and dynamics in the program perpetuate deficit-based perspectives of youth of color and constrain youths' interactivity with one another. Most of the youth in the program positively evaluate the program as a caring space, even while demonstrating more nuanced and contradictory understandings of the sociopolitical dimensions of care when sharing about their own educational experiences.

Given these findings, I conclude that a study of KMC sheds light on how CBE spaces can advance white paternalistic domination in education under a discursive guise of caring. I conclude that, for multiply-marginalized youth participating in KMC, the sociopolitics of care

and racial domination in the program serve to reinforce existing systemic educational injustices and to manipulate youths' affective agencies in negotiating such injustices. However, I also conclude that some elements of youths' participation in program instruction and sociopolitical meaning-making about care suggest powerful possibilities for youth leadership in developing and sustaining justice-based conceptions of care in CBEs. In all, this study's findings demonstrate how, even while building community buy-in and support, CBEs can advance systemic racial inequities and harms. They also demonstrate the promise and possibilities of seeing youths' caring agencies as resources in broader educational program contexts and in the specifics of instruction.

# Chapter I

## Introduction

> "The shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living; the relation of the knower to the known becomes the relation of the living self to the larger world...To put it in somewhat different terms, our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic."
>
> - Palmer, 1993, p. 21

In the summer of 2018, I met with Owen Danjuma,[1] a Black teenage boy and a resident of Detroit, Michigan, to ask him about his experience as a student and as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in an out-of-school mathematics program called the Kids Mathematics Coalition, or KMC. When I asked, "What kind of knowledge is valued in KMC?", Owen explained:

> Mathematical knowledge is valued, obviously, so you can teach techniques to do certain topics, like quadratic factoring stuff—there's a bunch of different ways to factor, so if you know a special way to factor that someone else doesn't know, and you're having trouble with the way the teacher's explaining it, then you can share that knowledge with them, and they can get it easier. And it's also a way of thinking—just caring and compassion and really trying to enforce the idea that this is a place we actually care about people.

Hearing Owen name caring as "a way of thinking," in addition to more typical academic content knowledge, I wanted to understand more about how he and his peers were understanding their educational experiences in KMC.

I had another chance, a year later, to witness Owen stand in front of more than 70 of his peers and offer his thanks and goodbyes before leaving KMC to attend a college preparatory

[1] All names of persons are pseudonyms, as is the name of the program of study

program. Between intermittent pauses to cry and joke and receive supportive laughter and words of encouragement from his peers, Owen said:

> A highlight of this week was walking from [one building to another on campus], and Charles said, "You're a really good TA; my grade didn't drop below a B!" and it made me feel good about myself, like I was doing something good…. KMC is always going to have a place in my heart. If this program can help people even half as much as it helped me personally, we're in business. Long story short: it is always, always a blessing to be here. I love all of you, and I hope that you all do good.

In discussing mathematics and care, and in expressing love for his peers, Owen had also twice named the KMC program itself: "a place we actually care about people," a program that was "always going to have a place" in his heart.

Despite the ubiquity of discourse about the generic importance of "care" in teaching, education research has not coalesced around a particular definition of care (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Rogers & Webb, 1991). However, critical education scholars have advanced understandings of care that attend to its systemic and sociopolitical dimensions (Ginwright, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Wilson, 2015). Moreover, many of these same scholars have theorized *critical care*, building on histories, knowledge traditions, and liberatory movements rooted in commitments to social justice and liberation—including educational justice and liberation. In 1893, Black woman educational advocate and scholar Anna Julia Cooper addressed the convening of the World's Congress of Representative Women. She expounded on Black women's historical record of work, advocacy, and sacrifice to send Black children to school, explaining that their advocacy acted as "the little leaven hid in the measure of meal, permeating life throughout the length and breadth of the Southland" (1893/2007, p. 3). In the

United States, ideals and actions related to care in education have always been political, relating to systems of privilege and oppression and peoples' agentic participation in and resistance to the institutionalization of those systems in schools.

Contemporary scholars have researched how care operates in the daily contexts of education and how care relates to fundamental arrangements of schooling. Critical strands of such research include scholarship about how various notions of care function vis-a-vis oppression, resistance, and transformative actions in education—both in schools and out of schools—in various racial, ethnic, and language communities (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2010). While much of this caring scholarship has focused on analyzing the politics of care at the macro-systems level (e.g. the foundations of our educational institutions) and at the local organizational, community, and school levels, there is less work that attends to the politics of care in content instruction or to youths' meaning-making about care across their various educational experiences. Valenzuela (1999) asserted the exigence of understanding care in instruction, explaining that educators must develop "relevant and authentic pedagogy" that directly engages the "'politics of caring'" (p. 255). Cooper (2009) named that this politics of caring involves attention to "contexts of racism" (p. 384). So, we can understand that care in education involves matters of culture and relationships and teaching skills and practice—and that these matters all relate to power and our agentic negotiations of power.

Given even just this brief discussion on the sociopolitical dimensions of care in education, Owen's discussion of caring as knowledge or as a "way of thinking" presents complex layers of possible meaning. If, as Palmer (1993) explained, "the shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living" (p. 21), then what we believe—about what knowledge is and how and by whom it can be known—manifests in our daily lives, including in

our communities, schools, and classrooms. In order to understand "knowledges" of educational care, we must grapple with the varying ways that "our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic" (Palmer, p. 21). In the field of education, this means interrogating how youth, families, communities, and educators have understood the operations of care in educational contexts and relating those understandings to our individual and collective social justice work.

## My Subjectivity in Researching Care in Education

My conversation with Owen was an eventual outgrowth of my developing interest in critical theories and practices of care in education. As part of a group of researchers on an informational visit to KMC in the summer of 2017, I was introduced to Dr. Thomas Cohen, a white, Jewish mathematics professor and the program's co-founder and director. In preparation for my visit, I had watched a video of Cohen giving a talk about the program (TEDx Talks Detroit, 2010). Speaking with his trademark New York accent and informal diction, Cohen had introduced the thematic focus of his talk by saying:

> We do teach math...but that's a different talk. This talk [is] about the philosophy of the KMC, 'cause that's it's essence...You gotta love every kid that comes to you and you gotta love 'em with a passion and an urgency.

I took note of the explicitness with which Cohen spoke of love. I also noted that Cohen was talking about a program founded by white men and operating in Detroit—of major cities in the U.S., the one with the highest percentage of Black residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Neither in his video speech nor the next day, in person, did Cohen substantively engage the significance of race and racism to the program's formation, operations, or philosophy. His omissions of any recognition of race as a power-laden social relation, as a construct undergirding systems of privilege and oppression, were familiar to me. My experiences as a former high school teacher—

a white woman teacher of Black and Latinx students, in a city I had just moved to—had transformed my understanding of the centrality of race and racialization in U.S. schooling, including how my own racial subjectivity was implicated in educational privilege and oppression. In particular, I left my K-12 teaching career with the distinct knowledge that my own socialization into "color-blind" and individualistic notions of care—notions of care associated with whiteness ideology—had harmed the youth of color in my classes (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). Still, despite my own personal learning, I realized I knew very little about scholarly and practical traditions of care that engaged race and centered justice—most of which, I since learned, have been authored by people of color. My subjectivity as a white woman informs how I integrate my epistemology and my ethics. In hearing Cohen talk about care and love for the youth of color in KMC with authentic feeling and well-intended purpose, I identified my subjective investment in developing a study about the politics of care and my interest in KMC as a potential site for such a study. Without presumptions about what I would find, I began to imagine how a study of care in KMC may contribute to our understandings about how white educators—like me, like Cohen, and like the millions[2] of white teachers who disproportionately comprise our teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a, 2020b)—can grow our professional knowledge and skills about care to shape our research and teaching practices, including those that occur in the daily instructional contexts of schools and outside-of-school programs.

[2] Per NCES (2020a), in fall 2020, there were 3.7 million teachers in the United States. Also per NCES (2020b), 79% of teachers were "non-Hispanic white" (p. 3)

## Research Rationale

Education research about care has revealed fundamental epistemological gaps between mainstream, white-centric conceptions of care and critical conceptions of intersectional, anti-racist, and justice-oriented care (Thompson, 1998; Wilson et al., 2013). While researchers and practitioners have often invoked the same language—especially the "ethic of care" language coined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984)—the ideals, logics, and discursive practices they attach to this language have varied. In epistemological alignment with critical care theorists, other critical education scholars are building a movement for re-visioning education through strengths- and asset-based approaches that take as axiomatic the brilliance of Black children and other children of color (Love, 2019; Martin, 2000). One type of educational space in which this kind of re-visioning has occurred is in community-based educational (CBE) programs (Baldridge et al., 2017). Communities and stakeholders often design CBE programs with intentions to disrupt institutional norms of schooling, including in the types of interactions and relationships such programs facilitate among youth and between youth and adults (Ginwright, 2010). However, CBE programs still operate in the larger sociopolitical context in which schools operate. This does not mean that such programs become identical to school institutions. In fact, education scholars have consistently found that CBE programs are educational places that can advance social justice in unique and powerful ways (Watson, 2012; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Still, scholars have found that broader educational ideologies and policies can persist in these out-of-school places—even in programs that actively engage youth in learning about and critiquing such ideologies and policies (Baldridge et al., 2017).

Moreover, researchers have demonstrated how the growth of neoliberal policies in education have influenced a growing number of community-based programs that are organized

by outside non-profit organizations and involve philanthropic investment (Baldridge, 2019; Kwon, 2013). Some of these programs are hybrid spaces, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA), which are organized by a national private philanthropic entity, partially funded by the federal government, and develop programming with local community members and youths' families (Kreider & Raghupathy, 2010). Other programs are designed, sponsored, and led entirely by people and organizations external to the communities the programs ostensibly serve. Still, by the very nature of being educational places that are *not* schools, researchers have found that these places can act as foils for people's meaning-making about schools and vice versa (Baldridge et al., 2017; Burman & Miles, 2020). Researchers have also explored how the persistence of neoliberal policies and funding models are relevant to how community-based educational spaces are organized and how youth and communities experience them (Baldridge et al., 2017; Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012). For instance, Baldridge (2019) found that when a youth CBE program shifted its organizational funding to attract more private investment, it "sometimes resulted in an overreliance on [youths'] academic college preparation work...rather than their more critical youth development work" (p. 202).

One ongoing tension in CBE programs is between the possibilities for supporting youths' academic achievement and success and the risks of assimilating these out-of-school contexts into the molds of dominant schooling (Baldridge et al., 2017; Watson, 2012). Dumas (2016) explained that academic support itself is an admirable aim—but it is an aim that is often shaped by and realized through dominant, marginalizing logics. Researchers have documented how structures of dominant schooling, including normative content and instruction, have reinforced systems of oppression and privilege. In mathematics education, scholarship has shown how the systemic privileging of whiteness and the systemic oppression and marginalization of Blackness

has been institutionalized in mathematics content, discourse, and teaching (Martin, 2013). KMC is a mathematics program, and while mathematics is not the primary focus of my study, scholarship illuminating the pervasiveness of racist marginalization in mathematics and the systemic implications of care in mathematics instruction means that it does have relevance to my study (Maloney & Matthews, 2020).

The movement for asset-based views of Black children and other children of color has been led by scholarship arguing for mathematics not just as a space to name and address inequities (made comparatively across racial groups), but as a space to grow and nurture marginalized and minoritized students' identities as doers of math. Gholson & Robinson (2019) explained the dominant premise in math education research is that "teaching and learning require a technical fix" (p. 9), such as improved curriculum design. However, the idea that a technical fix could thoroughly address inequities in mathematics learning is a premise "challenged by the voices of Black learners who narrate and illustrate a set of contextual and relational challenges that make mathematics learning difficult" (Gholson & Robinson, p. 9). Scholarship investigating racism in education has found that anti-Blackness informs the racialized marginalization of other youth of color, too, in mathematics education—including Latinx and Muslim youth (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). Educational practices that engage the sociopolitical dimensions of learning—including relational and instructional interactions involving care—must facilitate identity-affirming learning for Black students and other students of color. Indeed, many community-based educational programs have sought to develop relational and instructional practices that actively affirm the racial and cultural identities of youth of color in their programs (Baldridge et al., 2017; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

A focus on addressing relational concerns and possibilities in mathematics education and in community education spaces resonates with traditions of research that engage the multiple levels of interaction and influence between culture and power (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 457). Over a century ago, as a young Black woman pursuing higher education, Cooper (1890-91/1998) wrote about her experience feeling underestimated and unseen by her professor, even as she craved more learning:

> I had devoured what was put before me, and, like Oliver Twist, was looking around to ask for more. I constantly felt (as I suppose many an ambitious girl has felt) a thumping from within unanswered by any beckoning from without. (p. 85-86)

Today, Black children and other children of color continue to experience racism in classrooms—in explicitly hateful ways and also in ways that transmute racial violence into the lack of "any beckoning without." Researchers have shown that school actors manifest the "comingling of macro- and micro-level attitudes" toward racialized bodies through their behaviors and actions (Bajaj et al., 2016, p. 483). Thus, educational contexts, including instruction, are full of opportunities to disrupt patterns of oppression (Ball, 2017). In order to understand those opportunities—to identify moments when we can disrupt what otherwise may have been an invocation of systemic racism in an interpersonal interaction—it is vital that we understand how youth of color are perceiving and making meaning about their educational experiences.

In this study, I have focused on how the politics of care, race, and education operate in the programmatic context of KMC. In many ways, KMC seems to mimic normative schooling structures. At the time of my study, youth in the program were grouped by grade-level and/or placed in mathematics classes based on their program assessment scores. Mathematics teachers in the summer program were often full-time college and high school mathematics teachers.

Teachers provided homework and the program administered weekly assessments. Still, KMC also seems to diverge from school in readily apparent ways. In addition to mathematics classes, kids in the program participate in a number of other activities, including chess, dance, sports, and art. The program employs high school students as mentors to the middle school students, and so they are employees working a summer job at the same time that they are students enrolled in summer mathematics classes. KMC includes blocks of time that are dedicated to whole-program bonding and socialization. Thus, outside of its classroom activities, we might consider KMC to be quite different from a typical instructional environment. While I do pay attention to instruction in KMC classrooms, I also consider how the program itself is designed to teach particular content and has developed particular activities and structures for doing so. I also pay attention to how youth in KMC are perceiving and making meaning about the program—the learning they are doing in their participation.

These layers of instructional context in KMC are situated in a broader sociopolitical environment. Detroit is a context of KMC and of my research, including the city's particular politics of care, education, and race. Critical education policy scholars have taken up a robust critique of U.S. neoliberalism and its particular negative impacts on Black people and other people of color, especially people of color living with poverty (Ewing, 2018; Pedroni, 2011; Scott, 2011; Wilson, 2015). In recent decades, state power holders in Michigan have subverted local democratic control in Detroit to advance policies steeped in neoliberalism. These policies, including state-mandated school closures and a slate of loose charter regulation, have been unpopular with and detrimental to the city's residents (Hetrick et al., 2019; Wilson, 2015). Drawing on existing research about the particular racialized impacts of neoliberal education policies on communities of color, this policy context in Detroit is relevant to conversations about

educational content, relationships, opportunities, and material consequences of systemic neglect. It also pertains to CBEs in the city, which are both subject to the same neoliberal policy context and are commonly assumed to offer educational content or programming distinct from that found in public schools (Burman & Miles, 2020) and to be programs that facilitate community and youth empowerment (Kwon, 2013). So, in my study of KMC, I consider how care operates across broader social contexts, within the program overall, and within mathematics classes.

## Significance of Topic

In this dissertation study, I research how people in KMC conceive of care and how predominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to education and race. Included in this larger investigation, I also explore how KMC's programmatic discourses of care relate to normative instructional and non-instructional interactions in the program. Teacher education and content-specific education research has often focused on teaching and learning that occurs within instructional interactions—i.e., those dynamics or exchanges between teachers and students involving curricular content (Boileau, 2021; Herbst, 2006; Herbst & Chazan, 2011). At the same time, O'Connor (2020) made the case for education researchers to attend to the "multidimensional nature" of individual instances, including the policies and structures that "bound the playing field[s]" of such interactions (p. 472, p. 476). By moving across layers of interactions in KMC, this study surfaces how instructional and non-instructional interactions are interrelated "playing fields" where individual actors interact with structures of power. Lastly, I explore how youth of color in KMC negotiated and made meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their own educational experiences. This research about how care, race, and education interact with power and agency in a community-based education program will contribute to educators' knowledge and skillful actions for aligning rhetorics of care with community-identified

educational priorities that disrupt racist oppression and advance racial justice. Furthermore, by involving youths' meaning-making about care in education, this study attends to Detroit youths' particular knowledge about how care is relevant to teaching and learning. As a mathematics program founded by white mathematicians but enrolling Detroit youth of color—all of whom have experienced the effects of neoliberal disinvestment in their city's schools—KMC has proven to be a significant educational space in which to analyze the racial politics of care in education.

## Research Methods & Study Design

Using critical qualitative methodology, I conducted a case study of the sociopolitics of care, race, and education in the Kids Mathematics Coalition (KMC). KMC is a summer program focused on mathematics and mentoring, and during the time of my study was attended by middle- and high school-aged youth of color in Detroit, Michigan. KMC's founders explicitly billed the program as being built around a central philosophy of "loving and believing in kids" and also have touted the program's successes boosting Detroit kids' mathematics achievement scores. As a context of study, KMC included various settings, groupings of people, and program activities for me to engage with as a participant-observer.

During my initial visit to KMC, including observations and a long conversation with the program's director and co-founder, I noticed that the program leaders spoke much more about "care" and "love" being the focus of the program than mathematics. Furthermore, I was intrigued by some program structures that would be atypical in schools (for example, having near-peer mentors attend mathematics classes with their mentees) and what I perceived at the time to be students' enthusiasm for the program and its practices. Between the summer of 2017 and the spring of 2018, when I began to design my research study, I continued to think about the KMC

as I explored theoretical and empirical scholarship that wove together race, care, and power as topics of educational research. It was through this process that I began to consider how systems of power and oppression and individual meaning-making and agencies may interact around various notions of care in the Detroit KMC. I also began to connect these considerations with knowledge of Detroit's educational policy landscape and community activism (Wilson, 2015). Through previous research experience, I had some idea about how Detroiters were experiencing the negative ramifications of neoliberal urban education policies. However, I knew KMC to be an institution-based education program founded by white educators, and so perhaps particularly vulnerable to neoliberal, white educational logics. At the same time, the program is structured to extend students and instructors of color power in its operations and practices. While all of the children in the KMC were children of color, the administrative and teaching staff included white, Black, and Bengali Muslim people. Moreover, four of the six most prominent leadership positions in the program were occupied by white people. Lastly, in further communication with the KMC, representatives of the program re-asserted the program's purpose of "loving and believing in kids," but I still did not have a sense of how care operated in the program. Given all of these factors, I identified the KMC as an information-rich site for conducting a case study of the racial politics of care in a community-based education program.

Case study design means that I selected a social phenomenon as the focus of my study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Given existing scholarship on critical care in education and my particular subjectivity as a white woman invested in research that can support white educators' anti-racist work, I identified the social phenomenon in the study as the politics of race and care in a community-based education program. Because the politics of race and care in a particular location involve the complexities of human interaction in a community, over time, I used

ethnographic methods to situate my research in social context. These methods included participant-observation over the course of two years of the six-week summer camp and participant interviews with 17 participants with varying roles in the program.

Cook and Dixson (2013) named that scholars conducting research about race and racism in educational policy need to attend to the views of schools and communities impacted by those policies. This kind of critical educational research perspective aligns with traditions of case study work by focusing on a social phenomenon in a bounded context, but with an understanding that narratives, discourses, and lived experiences may be complex, multifaceted, and nonunitary (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Given the need to be both comprehensive in research and to center the youth and communities impacted by the social phenomenon of my study, I have practiced what Madison (2012) refers to as "ethnographic presence" (p. 11): a methodological commitment to interpreting, analyzing, and representing ethnographic data dialogically so that subjects are not represented statically. Practicing ethnographic presence also required my ongoing interrogation of and attendance to my researcher positionality. As a middle-class white woman, I was largely a racial and socioeconomic outsider at KMC. I have striven to attend to my positionality without centering my privileged identities in all aspects of the research process.

Drawing on over 110-hours of participant-observation data, interviews with 17 KMC participants of varying identities and positionalities within the program, and artifacts (as needed), I researched the following questions

1. How do KMC participants conceive of care and how do the dominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to issues of education and race?
2. How do KMC participants' conceptions of care relate to normative instructional practices and dynamics in the program, particularly those related to mathematics?

3. How do youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences?

In answering the first research question, I sought to understand what discourses and conceptions of care circulated in KMC, particularly with regard to issues related to race and education in the program. While attending to differences in participant's conceptions of care, I identified what discourses of care the program's founders and adult instructors privileged and/or discouraged. With the second research question, I sought to understand how these predominating conceptions of care in KMC related to normative dynamics in the program's mathematics classes. My third research question led me to specifically explore students' narrative meaning-making about their experiences of care in education. Taking a broader perspective allowed me to be open to how some youth were making meaning about care relative to their broader educational experiences as youth in Detroit schools, with KMC as another site of experience. Furthermore, I sought to understand what sociopolitical issues youth explicitly and implicitly identified in their meaning-making.

## Conclusion

My study of the politics of race, care, and education in the Kids Mathematics Coalition explores and extends theoretical and practical understandings of critical care and instruction in community-based educational contexts. This work is responsive to critical education scholarship that seeks to advance community-engaged educational care practices and ethics (Rolón-Dow, 2005; Sosa-Provencio, 2019). It also responds to critical education scholarship that has emphasized the need for school actors to operate beyond the level of personal relationships by adopting a "wide-angle vision" (O'Connor et al., 2006, p. 22). My study has focused on the racial politics of care in KMC through such a wide-angle vision. Wilson (2016) wrote that

"authentic educational care is not just related to social or individualized practice; rather, it is a culturally relevant action that has political ramifications" (p. 560). In my investigation into how care operates in KMC, I recognize and interrogate how it functions as a social and individual practice—and, per Wilson, I ultimately analyze its political ramifications. This dissertation offers insights into the possibilities and perils for building critical care praxis in community-based education programs—particularly those where program leadership and instructors can work to identify and learn how to transform their own socialization into knowledge about and practices of care that maintain racial oppression in education.

## Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2 of my dissertation, I draw upon and situate my research in relation to research about critical care praxis in education, outside-of-school contexts as spaces for disrupting and negotiating normative institutional systems and constraints, and instructional contexts for disrupting or reinforcing systemic racism, particularly pertaining to mathematics. I integrate key concepts and theories from research in these fields that have framed and informed my study of KMC, including my analyses and interpretations. In Chapter 3, I detail my study's methodology in order to illuminate its epistemic and ontological commitments, priorities, and boundaries. I describe how this methodological lineage has shaped the case study design and methods of my study, including the specifics of my data analysis and representation.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I detail my study's findings. In Chapter 4, I describe KMC's programmatic discourses of care and how those discourses related to the program's engagements (or non-engagements) with issues of race and education. I also describe how youths' meaning-making about the sociopolitics of care demonstrated that they both took up the program's dominant discourses about care, race, and education and also that they often attenuated these

discourses when considering their own educational experiences and perspectives. In Chapter 5, I discuss findings about how conceptions of care in KMC related to the program's normative instructional practices. In this chapter, I combine classroom vignettes with interview and other participant-observation data to describe how instructional interactions related to broader discourses of care, race, and education. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I discuss my study's findings and demonstrate how these findings contribute to theoretical understandings of how notions and practices deemed "caring" in education programs and classrooms can reproduce racism and reify systems of whiteness in CBEs and other educational contexts. I also share my conclusion that some elements of youths' participation in program instruction and sociopolitical meaning-making about care suggest powerful possibilities for youth leadership in developing and sustaining justice-based and race-engaged conceptions of care in CBEs.

# Chapter II

## Conceptual Framework

Peoples and communities of color—including education scholars and practitioners, youth, families, and communities—have continued to find, practice, and champion the significance of care in humanizing, liberatory education. So, in my study of the interactions of race, care, and power in a community-based education program, I looked to the knowledges and practices advanced by peoples of color in their ongoing advocacy for educational justice. Black education scholars and practitioners have connected their contemporary work for racial justice in education with robust histories of Black peoples and communities' educational advocacy and leadership (Anderson, 1988; Wilson, 2014; Williams, 2005). In addition to scholarship focused on national movements and civil and legal battles for Black educational rights, these scholars have detailed how Black mothers, extended families and kin, teachers, administrators, and school communities have practiced leadership in their collective organizing and in the daily work of practicing community-centered care (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021; Wilson, 2014, 2015). In *The Lost Education of Horace Tate* (2018), Vanessa Siddle Walker argued that there are societal and material costs to diminishing "the role of Black educators, their organizations, and their leaders advocating for Black children in America's changing justice terrain" (p. 5). Particularly, she demonstrated how ignoring these "hidden provocateurs" allows us to lose sight of how power and agency are built, exercised, and negotiated in the everyday work of education (p. 2).

In my work surrounding the broader topics of this case study, I have accumulated dozens upon dozens of saved websites, documents, and audio files that provide glimpses into individuals' experiences with the sociopolitics of race, care, and education. One of these saved files is an oral history, conducted with Miriam Grigsby Bates of Charlotte, North Carolina (Bates, 1993). Ms. Bates, a Black girl born in 1926, eventually grew up to be an educator. When the interviewer asked Ms. Bates what her childhood teachers—all Black teachers in segregated schools—were like, she said:

> Beyond being a teacher, you know, we used to say that elementary schools nor high schools needed guidance counselors, because every teacher was a counselor. And I think every teacher advised you in some way, and I think most of them were very positive role models from what we saw as youngsters. They were encouraging. I don't remember having any great fears of teachers, and I think one of my high school teachers probably was responsible for the major I chose when I went to school. I liked the class a lot. He made it interesting to the point where I wanted to pursue something in that area [biology]… I feel as though I enjoyed what I was doing in that class and that he was a part of making me enjoy what I was doing.

Ms. Bates' story captures the profound influence her teacher had—an influence she named in connection with the fact that she did not recall "having any great fears of teachers." 60 years later, at the time of the interview, time had not erased the meaning that engaging pedagogy and a feeling of safety in school had for Ms. Bates.

With attention to how power and agency are built, exercised, and negotiated in the everyday work of education, I review literature to showcase how existing scholarship about care and race have informed my study of the KMC. I also conceptualize how scholarship about

critical care praxis in education, community-based education programs, and instruction and teaching practice provide a framework through which we can understand how conceptions and practices of care in KMC have or have not constituted critical care praxis, how those conceptions related to instruction, and youths' meaning-making about the sociopolitical context of the program can inform our understanding of the links between critical care praxis and teaching.

## Critical Care Praxis in Education

There is robust scholarship documenting, defining, and theorizing conceptions of care in education that are justice-oriented and race-engaged. As researchers explicitly engaged in critical traditions of scholarship, critical care scholars in education have explored the role that care may play in advancing social justice. In line with this commitment, critical care scholarship reflects close attention to the various and particular sociocultural, political, and historical contexts of the peoples and communities involved. So, it is important to note that critical care scholars have explored culturally- and historically-specific dimensions of care. Still, in my review of the literature, I found that education scholars asserted some common elements of critical care (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Cooper, 2009; DeNicolo et al., 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). The most central common feature of this scholarship is a definitional understanding that critical care is praxis—the coupling of theory and practice (Wilson et al., 2013).

While "care" is most often considered a quality of interpersonal relationships, critical care theorists have rooted *critical* care in traditions of empowerment and collective racial justice work. For instance, in explaining Black feminist and womanist traditions of care, Cooper (2009) named the critical foundations of the traditions, stating: they "reject binaries of justice and care, emphasize African Americans' traditional concern with both individual care and collective uplift,

link caring relations to the contexts of racism, and reveal the political nature of care" (p. 384). A particular ethical dimension of Black womanist caring is a commitment to an "ethic of risk" (Welch, 1990, cited in Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 80). With an ethic of risk, individuals commit to caring action with a dual understanding: (a) that social justice is a continuous, multigenerational project and (b) that one's individual existence is inextricably bound up in others' (p. 81). These dual ethics sustain both a deep sense of urgency and a sustained commitment to practicing critical care.

In the context of education, specifically, Wilson (2014) explained that Black womanist caring is related to long histories of Black women's educational leadership and advocacy, in which Black women practiced care that is "family and community-centered" and a mode of "investment in the elevation of other African Americans as a whole" (p. 40). Cooper[3] (2007) and other Black womanist scholars have further connected contemporary Black caring practices to the epistemological standpoint and historical leadership of Black mothers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004). Other research has shown that critical care can be enacted through school-based leadership practices, curricular choices, and relationships. Wilson et al. (2013) found that educators could enact this type of leadership by: (a) working toward Bartolomé's (2008) notion of "ideological and political clarity" (p. 124), such that they can advocate for broader social change and hold their own practice to account with those ends; (b) "critically self-reflect[ing] and decenter[ing] white privilege" (p. 125), including actively rejecting colorblind notions of meritocracy and examining how educational systems have been tools for white accumulation of social and material capital; (c) "gain[ing] racial and cultural

[3] Cooper (2007, 2009) and Wilson (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018; 2013, with T-R.M.O. Douglas & C.W. Nganga; 2017, with R.D. Wilkerson) are the same author.

competencies" (p. 126) by offering culturally diverse and responsive curriculum and learning more about how to see and express value for non-white cultures; (d) "care[ing] in critical ways" and "knowing that caring is a political endeavor that is also socially constructed" (p. 127); and "partner[ing] with African American families and extended kin" while appreciating families' love for and support of their children. This is a detailed list, but its specificity is important in its concretization of theory into practice. Wilkerson and Wilson (2017) offered empirical examples of such praxis in their research about the work of two Black school principals leading predominantly Black schools. They found that the principals exercised critical care in a number of ways, including supplying food and clothing for families and children who needed it, firing teachers who persisted in viewing and treating students from a deficit-based perspective, and advocating against racist district leadership and policies (p. 785-787).

Other literature exploring critical care praxis has particularly focused on Latinx and immigrant communities (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela conducted a seminal study of the politics of care at one high school involving Mexican American students, immigrant Latinx students, and (mostly) white adults. She found that a dominant schooling context denigrated and undermined youths' values for education and the social and cultural resources that they drew upon in their learning, including Spanish language and student organizations. In addition to attending to xenophobic and nativist oppressions related to language and citizenship, critical care theorists focused on Latinx and immigrant communities commonly identified that these communities are racialized and experience racism connected to white supremacy and anti-Blackness, too. Rolón-Dow (2005) asserted that a "color(full) critical care praxis" would begin with the acknowledgment that "to care for students of color in the United States, we must seek to understand the role that

race/ethnicity has played in shaping and defining the sociocultural and political conditions of their communities" (p. 104). In a critical conceptualization of care focused on Mexican and Mexican American youth, Sosa-Provencio (2019) added an important (but often overlooked) component to the naming of attention to race and ethnicity by highlighting the significance of attending to cultural strengths, joys, and ancestral legacies. She explained that acting on knowledge of sociopolitical and historical context includes nurturing children's culturally-informed resistance and activism to systems of power. Emphasizing culturally-relevant praxis also demonstrates how critical care theory is aligned with other traditions of critical educational praxis, including those that have explicitly named love as an element of praxis. For instance, Bartolomé (2008) explicitly engaged Freirian notions of love in ways that align with critical care scholars' theorizing, particularly by contextualizing love in ideological and political context and focusing love on social justice aims.

Similar to Wilson et al.'s (2013) argument that educators practicing critical care must decenter whiteness, Rolón-Dow (2005) asserted that teachers seeking to practice critical care must "unpack their ideologies of progress, opportunity, and success within our society," including legacies and influences of "racial/colonial oppression…[and] white privilege and racism" (p. 104). Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) further argued that a particular dimension of critical care in education is the coupling of high expectations and authentically-supportive relationships. Relationships built with this dynamic communicate respect and expectation for students' agentic participation in their education. Aligned with Wilson et al.'s (2013) argument for racial and cultural competency in curriculum is DeNicolo et al.'s (2017) research about critical care as a practice for developing immigrant students' sense of belonging in school communities. DeNicolo et al.'s analysis demonstrated how attention to representation

and critical examinations of social contexts can be integral to students' feelings of belonging in school. Furthermore, their study demonstrated that schools could advance immigrant students' sense of being cared for by facilitating peer support networks, like student organizations. Through these peer support networks, students can work together to advocate for justice and equity pertinent to their ethnic and racial identities and other sociopolitical dimensions of their identities, like faith and language. In other words, supporting and facilitating *youths'* critical care becomes a part of educators' critical care praxis. Across scholarship about critical care in education, researchers have demonstrated how critical care transcends interpersonal interactions to address collectivist and structural concerns.

Critical care scholars in education have also consistently made clear that the knowledge traditions and the commitments to acting for social justice that constitute critical care are situated in long histories: both as ways of thriving, celebrating, being, and belonging and as modes of resistance to the rearticulations of white supremacist settler-colonial power that have shaped public institutions, including schools. Researchers have theorized and studied how critical care praxis has operated in relation to particular cultural values, sociohistorical contexts, and youth perspectives on care and education. While denoting the necessity of attending to local interpretations and contexts, critical care scholars have advanced common ideas about knowledges and actions that constitute critical care praxis in education (see Table 2.1 on the following page).

**Table 2.1**

*Knowledges and actions that synthesize as critical care praxis in education*

***Components of Critical Care Praxis in Education***

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledges of...** | Social, political, cultural, and historical contexts | School community/ies and families | Students as whole people | Self (including racialized self and sociopolitical positionality) | Care and justice as co-constitutive | The ecological relationship between individuals and systems | An ethic of risk and urgency |
| | *(Wilson, 2015; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004)* | *(Valenzuela, 1999; Wilson, 2014)* | *(Ginwright, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999)* | *(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Cooper, 2007)* | *(Wilson, 2015; Thompson, 1998)* | *(Cooper, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999)* | *(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002)* |
| **Actions to...** | Building authentic, asset-based relationships with families and communities | Developing and practicing culturally-relevant pedagogies | Critically self-reflecting, maintaining accountability, and making repair | Decentering whiteness in educational contexts and curriculum & instruction | Aligning rhetoric of care with actions that support community-defined justice | Engage students as agents of critical care | Participate in advocacy and activism to advance social justice |
| | *(Wilkerson & Wilson, 2017)* | *(Wilson et al., 2013)* | *(Ginwright, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013)* | *(Rolón-Dow, 2005; Wilson et al., 2013)* | *(Antrop-González & De Jesus, 2006; Bartolomé, 2008)* | *(DeNicolo et al., 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2005)* | *(Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Wilson, 2014)* |

## Dominance and Critique of the White Feminist Ethic of Care

Black and Latinx teachers, families, and education researchers building intellectual knowledge and practice of critical care in education have demonstrated its potential for disrupting racist privilege and oppression. Still, research indicates that critical care in education continues to be a concept predominantly engaged and practiced by youth, families, educators, and researchers of color. I conducted my search for literature about concepts of care in education in peer-reviewed academic journals in the area of Education and Educational Research. Within that subset of journals, over 6000 results returned when I searched for "education AND care." When I searched for "education AND care AND race," only 359 results came back. When I added "justice" as a topic term, I got 38 results. So, even while my searches suggested a tremendous surge in interest about care in education, and despite the availability of robust work connected to centuries of advocacy and activism, search results ultimately indicated that most mainstream literature about care in education does not focus on race or racial justice. This aligns with a conclusion I reached from a more detailed review of care literature in education. The vast majority of the literature I reviewed—including literature reviews about care in education—began the "story" of care in the 1980s, with Carol Gilligan's (1982) and Nel Noddings' (1984) white feminist care theories. These theories have continued to serve as the cornerstone frameworks for scholarship on care in education. So—knowing how critical care theorists articulated the knowledge and actions that would comprise critical care praxis in education—I examine white feminist care theories in order to better understand how they have informed mainstream research and practice. I later contrast critical care theories with white feminist care theories to show opportunities for critical care to inform research about instruction.

Aligned with broad feminist commitments to challenging objectivity, Gilligan (1982) said in her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, that she wanted to challenge the existence of "a single mode of social experience and interpretation" (p. 21). In a thorough consideration of Gilligan's work in the field of feminist moral theory, Hekman (1995) explained that Gilligan's major critique of existing moral models was that they defined morality "in terms of the evolution of autonomous, separate selves who are eventually capable of applying abstract universal principles to moral problems" (p. 5). In contrast, Gilligan advanced a feminist epistemology of relationality—i.e., knowing what is moral or immoral involves gendered subjectivities, relationships, and contexts. On one hand, this ideal of relational morality challenged white paternalistic assumptions about how those advantaged by systems of power could define morality. Still, Gilligan's ethic of care primarily operationalized care as an individual relation structured by gender subjectivity and steeped in white cultural norms.

Expanding on Gilligan's (1982) work, Nel Noddings (1984, 1988, 1992) asserted a feminist ethic of care that she situated squarely within educational contexts, including the organization of schools and teaching practice. Critiquing schools for institutionalizing "Christian-American supremacy" (1988, p. 217) by focusing on individual student reform and compliance, Noddings explored the ethic of care as a foundation for re-visioning schools. Noddings argued that school communities built around an ethic of care could simultaneously nurture a value for interdependence and nurture each member's individuality. In *An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements* (1988), Noddings wrote that in relations of care:

> [For ethical] agents, [the] primary concern is the relation itself—not only what happens physically to others involved in the relation and in connected relations but what they may feel and how they may respond to the act under consideration. (p. 140)

Noddings, like Gilligan, embraced relationality as central to practicing care. For Noddings, the quality of care—the morality of care—is dependent on "the carer or 'one caring'" being responsive to "the needs, wants, and initiations" of the person they are caring for (p. 219). In the context of schools, Noddings explained that being responsive in this particular way required the teacher to "become engrossed" (p. 219) with their students, such that the teacher is fully open to students' perceptions of their experiences and relations. In further explanation of relational caring, Noddings also argued that caring in schools can be decomposed into four processes: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (p. 222). In each of these four processes, Noddings said that no "rule or principle" (p. 219) could ensure that these processes would accomplish care. Instead, in Noddings' theorizing about an ethic of care, teachers needed to work skillfully and continually in order to develop competency in caring in ways that could only ever be considered successful if affirmed as such by their students.

Some of the rhetoric of white feminist care theory echoes Black womanist theories of care. Noddings' and Gilligan's focus on relational ethics and notions of interdependence and subjective moralities do not, at least on the surface, contradict Black womanist mores (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). However, Black womanist and feminist scholars, such as Cooper (2007) and Siddle Walker (1993), have critiqued white feminist care theories for continuing to advance dominant oppressive ideologies, including through their assertions that an ethic of justice and an ethic of care are oppositional. In *Not the Color Purple: Black Feminist Lessons for Educational Caring* (1998), white woman scholar Audrey Thompson critiqued white care

theories for failing to grapple with power and race and for, instead, assuming white cultural norms and racial ideologies. In her analysis, these ideological norms include presuming the centricity of whiteness, color-evasiveness, idealism, (re)claiming personal innocence, and stubborn ahistoricism.

In a study of Black teachers' culturally relevant caring practices in their teaching of Black students, Roberts (2010) found that the teachers in her study demonstrated "a willingness to unmask hidden faces of racism by exposing and unveiling white privilege and its effects in its various permutations" (p. 458). Moreover, she described how Black teachers' political clarity involved knowledge of lived experience and navigation of racist systems and institutions—and that communicating this knowledge to Black students was a form of care not recognized within mainstream "discussions of teacher care as colour blind actions that 'try to help all students' or are considered 'just part of good teaching'" (p. 462). Roberts' research is one example of education scholarship that seeks to intentionally broaden and particularize care theory to reflect Black educators' professional care work. However, as Hoagland (1990) and Schutz (1998) (both white scholars) have pointed out, Noddings' feminist ethic of care posits a fundamental assumption that people do not have communal interests—an assumption contradicted by Roberts' findings. By reducing care to individual subject-object exchanges, the white feminist ethic of care could be "a shared practice, but one learned in the context of multiple caring relations where each carer aims to maintain the Otherness of the cared-for" (Schutz, p. 388). The maintenance of individual, decontextualized narratives of self and other forecloses an ethic of care from animating collective movements. The white feminist ethic of care is both dangerous and ignorant of historically-rooted traditions of critical care praxis *and* aligned with the continued popularity of individual, color-blind notions of care among white educators.

## Limitations and Gaps of the Literature on Care and Critical Care in Education

By reading within and across literature, we gain a more detailed understanding of the synthesis of knowledge and action that comprises critical care praxis (see Table 2.1). Still, educational research as a field continues to rely on white feminist care theories. Critiques of white feminist care theory have demonstrated how its predominance in the field focuses our shared knowledge about care on abstract philosophy and/or individual relationships and precludes critical analyses of care, race, and power.

Work exploring educational injustices and inequities is vitally important to critical care praxis—such identification can contribute to growing knowledge and skillful action. However, there is limited utility and humanity in scholarship about inequities in education that does not recognize pre-existing and ongoing critical care praxis. There is a need for more care scholarship to center issues of race and justice—to build, from a place of responsiveness, with the already-existing scholarly and experiential knowledge traditions of critical care that have been largely authored by people of color. Furthermore, we can grow critical care scholarship (and praxis) by continuing to trace operations of power and exercises of agency across individual, local, and systemic contexts. For those who aim to research and/or practice critical care in education, we have much more to learn about how critical care praxis relates to the very specific interactions and work that comprise instruction.

### Dialectics of Care and Domination in Community-based Education Programs

Given the dominance of white normative conceptions of care in education—imbricated with other patterns of racist oppression and privilege—the exigence of critical care praxis is evident. My review of literature has sought to show how critical care in education—while marginalized in traditional teaching practice—has operated as a paradigm through which youth,

families, communities, and educators have practiced justice-based, humanizing care within systems that promote the opposite. Of central significance to my study is that, while much critical care praxis has happened within and surrounding public schooling, there is an enduring history of peoples and communities of color forming outside-of-school education spaces to meet their needs, particularly when institutional systems would not. Today, just as in history, youth and families of color often seek environments outside of predominantly white institutions with a hope that such environments will be comparatively humanizing (Kwon, 2013).

In particular, many youth of color look to join community-based-education (CBE) programs, such as programs teaching and supporting civic participation (e.g. youth organizing teams) and programs establishing affinity-group networks for youth (e.g. faith-based summer camps). Recent research has explored how youths' meaning-making about outside-of-school education programs is often inherently comparative to their meaning-making about school (Burman & Miles, 2020). As I discuss more in the section that follows, this comparative meaning-making is a form of dialectical meaning-making (Baldridge et al., 2017). Meaning-making is a way of talking about peoples' knowledge without holding that knowledge as somehow static or objectively knowable. Instead, people are constantly engaging in processes of meaning-making, including striving to understand themselves and others. Dialectical meaning-making is meaning-making informed by comparing two or more often contradictory ideas. Critically, some scholars have demonstrated how dialectical meaning-making is connected to a larger sociopolitical dialectic: neoliberal educational politics and liberatory educational politics (Baldridge et al., 2017; Burman and Miles, 2020). Given critical care theory's philosophical association with liberatory educational politics, I seek to understand how people in community-education programs negotiate and make meaning about the interactions of power, race, and care.

Dialectical meaning-making necessarily involves negotiating the operations of structural power and the realities of peoples' agency. To this end, Baldridge et al. (2017) noted that CBE programs are situated "in a contradictory space where they are beholden to neoliberal logics of academic success by the state and also act as liberatory spaces for minoritized youth" (p. 382). For example, KMC includes youth in leadership positions in ways that distribute power more widely than would be typical in schools. However, the program also solicits funding by comparing its participants' ACT scores with the average score for a student in Detroit. I detail more of Baldridge et al.'s analysis on the dialectical nature of CBE programs in the sections that follow and place it in conversation with other literature about community-based education spaces. In particular, I identify three strands of dialectical tensions in CBE programs that are related to practicing care. I also connect these three strands of caring tensions—content, healing and actualization, and relationships—to critical care praxis.

**Practicing Care in Content & Culture**

Research has highlighted the possibilities for CBE programs to develop culturally-relevant curricula (Garcia-Olp et al., 2019)—one element of critical care praxis. In a review of research on community-based education for minoritized youth, Baldridge et al. (2017) found that one of the imaginative possibilities in CBE spaces was the flexibility in content and programming. For example, a CBE program may be able to choose curriculum without oversight by state education boards or relying on major textbook publishers. It may also invite guests to present or facilitate activities without having to go through levels of bureaucratic clearance that a school district may require. Halpern (2002) explained that part of such flexibility is rooted in CBE programs' orientation and responsiveness to children's holistic well-being (another focus of critical care praxis). It is important to note that, in this particular dynamic, the CBE program acts

as a space where what "care" looks like and entails in educational activities may be more closely involved or aligned with community members' self-identified interests. CBE programs are often able to develop relationships of accountability with families and communities that are not mediated through large bureaucracies.

Watson (2012) described one powerful way a CBE space expanded beyond school-based content. Watson researched the work of Dereca Blackmon, a Black woman leader of a youth leadership and activism organization. In a visit to the organization, Watson detailed how the youth had made large silhouettes of themselves. They used words and images to express their self-identifications and important parts of themselves, including their Blackness, gender identities, and political values (p. 20). Watson included the text that one Black youth had written on their silhouette:

> With my eye that's at the top of the sky shining rays down on my people…
>
> And making my people realize that they are no longer a token…
>
> With my eye I can see what most others can't and will not want to see.
>
> For me this is a world of wonderful and talented young people. (p. 20)

In this text, the author asserted a positive and affirming vision of Black youth, providing just one example of how the CBE's curriculum facilitated students' expressions of their whole, integrated selves—an act aligned with critical care praxis. In a study focusing on positive, identity-affirming CBE programs for Black boys, Baldridge et al. (2011) found that Black male youth also found participation in a CBE to be affirming in culturally-relevant ways. One young man said having a curriculum that included various community service activities "helped me be able to get in touch with a whole lot of different places about myself and stuff like that. It helped me grow up" (p. 132). The authors showed how that kind of affirmation was connected to youth

developing positive visions and goals for their future selves that weren't rooted in deficit-based, racist stereotypes. As I discussed earlier, critical care praxis includes asset-based and identity-engaged knowledge and practice. This example shows how programmatic flexibility and curricula focused on youths' holistic well-being can help make CBE participation affirming for youth. It also reflects how involving youth as agents of critical care praxis can be an important part of their participation, nurture, and affirmation.

Importantly, some of these same programs providing affirming curricular activities also used content similar to that found in schools. Baldridge et al (2017) explained:

> The educational impact of CBEs lies in their capacity to connect political, social, and cultural education with the dominant academic standards of school. This connection allows students to bridge their lived reality and identity development with the academic standards deemed important and has been shown to increase typical measures of student success. (p. 389)

Still, alongside the powerful possibilities of bridging school academics with other dimensions of education, there is a risk of reifying dominant modes of education that frame youths' and communities' needs in deficit-based ways and perpetuate racism.

Funding is another area where caring through content in out-of-school programs becomes more actively entangled with broader policy contexts and power structures. Anderson and Larson (2009) found that such programs commonly respond to the academic learning needs of minoritized youth by reproducing school-based notions of achievement and success. For instance, Anderson and Larson reported that youth participating in an Upward Bound program faced pressure in the program to learn standardized test content aligned with high school mathematics. Ultimately, two of the boys Anderson and Larson interviewed dropped out of the

program. One explained that "It was too much to deal with. It felt like quicksand all the time. I was sinking" (p. 103). Baldridge (2014) tied the persistence of school-based content in outside-of-school programs to the neoliberal landscape of non-profit funding that often incentivizes programs to demonstrate the impact of their programming on youths' standardized achievement scores. As programs take up this kind of evaluation metric, they risk reorienting themselves around dominant notions of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This scholarship illuminates how KMC's focus on mathematics and its embrace of testing underscore the potential complexity around the politics of care and instruction in the program, as I address in Chapter 5. Moreover, I extrapolate this dynamic tension between a CBE's need for funding and the reproduction of harmful dominant educational norms to Douglas and Peck's (2013) explanation of the risk of multi-directional distrust and fear in CBE spaces:

> Some educational and community stakeholders may fear the lack of traditional structures and controls in these spaces. Others may express concern that utilizing community venues more intentionally will lead to the inevitable alteration or sanitization of inherently messy, organic spaces. (p. 84)

There is a porous boundary between work supporting educational success and the reification of dominant education perspectives that frame standards as meaningful measures of learning. Critical care praxis can include responsiveness to students' and families' aims to improve youths' measured success in school, but such responsiveness is engaged with particular knowledges, relationships, accountability commitments that serve to recalibrate praxis towards racial and social justice. The porousness of the boundary—and particularly for work not derived from critical praxis—is part of the precarity youth and adults navigate in their meaning-making about CBEs.

**Practicing Care in Healing and Actualization**

Black feminist thinker and educator bell hooks (1994) wrote that a foundational aim of education should be self-actualization. In my review of literature about CBE spaces, I identified that CBEs often connect self- and community-actualization with a focus on healing and care. In many ways, this focus reflects an attention to children's very real needs to heal from trauma experienced in current oppressive systems and our collective needs to transform those systems to address the root causes of harm. In an extensive, long-term study of Black youth programming centered in principles of care and justice, Ginwright (2010) analyzed practices of "radical healing and care" (p. 80). He explained that Camp Akili, a camp for Black youth, included political education to facilitate students' understandings of structural inequalities. This learning was considered an important factor in the youths' healing from the trauma associated with structurally-imposed inequities. In various publications, Ginwright referred to CBE practices of supporting youth in healing from trauma and enacting collective action as ways to support "social capital" (2010, p. 56) or "critical social capital" (2007, p. 403). Ginwright (2010) explicitly connected social capital to critical care praxis, explaining that social capital refers to "cultural, communal, and political solidarity in addition to interpersonal relationships" (p. 57). Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) also investigated how social capital built through intergenerational community programs can spur youth engagement in "critical social praxis" (p. 694). Ginwright and Cammarota define critical social praxis as "the organizational processes that promote civic engagement among youth and elevate their critical consciousness and capacities for social justice activism" (p. 699). The focus on critical analysis and social action is not unique to CBE programs; it has a long history in the broader field of critical pedagogies (e.g. Freire, 1972; Gay, 2000; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). However, a review

of the research demonstrates that healing and self- and community-actualization are important aims for youth and that youth experience these educational priorities as acts of care that affirm their agency, decenter whiteness, advance culturally responsive and justice-engaged work—as acts that, in short, align with critical care praxis. Moreover, focusing learning around supporting students' capacities to advance social change is a dramatic departure from school-based curricula. Programs that prioritize youths' participation in critical analyses and actions are often growing, facilitating, and recognizing youth as practitioners of critical care praxis—where care is mutually understood as a sociopolitical action and not a commodity or affectation.

An understanding of caring practices in CBE spaces being related to promoting healing and actualization can operate in ways that are fundamentally asset-based, such as the dynamics Ginwright (2010) described at Camp Akili. However, this same rhetoric of healing and actualization can be taken up with deficit assumptions of youth, and especially minoritized youth and communities. In this frame, healing is not a way of encouraging youth agency; instead, it is a judgment of internal brokenness and reinforces deficit-based assumptions about youth of color. For example, Dumas (2016) argued that President Barack Obama's organization, My Brother's Keeper, is a CBE deeply entangled with such a deficit frame. While he noted that the program has many worthy goals, he also explained the program ultimately operates within "a neoliberal project intended to undermine more fundamental change by locating problems within (the bodies of) Black boys and young men rather than in the social and economic order" (p. 97). A critical care orientation toward healing would involve working toward fundamental changes to the social and economic order as a part of caring praxis. In contrast, a deficit-orientation towards healing assumes that individuals need to change instead of systems. Baldridge (2014) made a similar critique of the neoliberal policy context in which CBEs operate, arguing that neoliberalism

thrives on deficit-based pathologies of brokenness. For example, Baldridge interviewed a leader of a community-based education program for youth, who explained that

> ...we've really struggled with articulating youth development in a way that resonates with funders, because they want to know how many kids didn't get pregnant or [are] not on drugs…Funders want to know how many people did you save. And guess what? We're not saving anybody; people save themselves. (p. 462)

Thus, as with content decisions, CBEs face tensions in pursuing funding that ultimately pressures them to articulate a deficit view of youth and communities.

**Practicing Care in Relationships**

In my review of literature on CBE spaces, I identified that CBE programs often assert discourses of care related to intensive focuses on building and maintaining relationships. For example, Ginwright (2010) explained that part of the concept of healing from the trauma of oppression is subverting isolation and distrust. A key mechanism he identified to do so was nurturing relationships between Black youth and between Black youth and Black adults. Similarly, in Watson's (2012) profiling of community-based educators in the San Francisco Bay Area, she found that every one of the educators she profiled emphasized listening to youth as a key to building strong relationships with them. Cassidy and Bates (2005) found that youth also identified listening and other forms of deep acknowledgement and acceptance to be integral elements of caring relationships with adults. One youth they interviewed explained that they had had experiences with teachers who just "don't listen to you as much...like I'll ask for help...sometimes they just totally ignore you" (p. 89). Youth are, unsurprisingly, deeply aware of adults' verbal and non-verbal communications of interest and care. Other research has emphasized how relationships in CBEs between youth and adults can help cultivate

intergenerational ties (Ginwright, 2007) and collective understandings of how individuals in the organization are all interconnected (Watson et al., 2016). The fact that CBEs are an "other" educational space helps provide room for imagining other ways of being in relationship with peers and adults.

Of course, relational participation in CBEs is still situated in larger systems of power and privilege. By focusing so narrowly on individual relations and largely avoiding considerations of systems of power and varying cultural mores about relationships, white feminist care theories fail to account for how humans may negotiate and practice care in interaction with systems—including systems that institutionalize care for some and neglect for others—in racialized ways (Roberts, 2010). In community-based education contexts, Baldridge (2019) found that relationships can engage power-laden tensions between care and domination when adults invoke and practice high expectations for youth. As Baldridge explained, the concept of high expectations for minoritized youth can at once contradict deficit-based assumptions about their abilities and can feed into narratives of personal responsibility and individualism that fail to engage a systemic analysis. Baldridge also found that when a prominent CBE underwent an "expansion and subsequent reliance on racialized neoliberal rhetoric and patterns of success via growth models" (p. 150), the youth reported feeling a breakdown in the quality of the relationships with adults in the organization. Watson (2012) noted that systemic factors like a lack of funding and resources, complexity of community needs, and relative scarcity of fellow organizations can contribute to community educators burning out. Turnover in community-based educational spaces can challenge caring through relationships. CBE scholarship highlights how individual relationships are situated in and interactive with organizational cultures and structures as well as with systems of privilege and oppression. This ecological perspective aligns with

critical care praxis' focus on addressing both individual and institutional operations of care (Rolón-Dow, 2005).

**Limitations and Gaps in the Research on Community-Based Education**

Much of the literature on community-based education programs has more rigorously and substantively engaged race and racism than the dominant literature on educational care. The CBE literature I have reviewed, overall, also centered youth voices and perspectives much more than I found in mainstream educational care literature. Still, there are two primary limitations of the research on out-of-school education programs. In extant literature, scholars have assessed community-based educational programs success at promoting in-school academic achievement (Douglas & Peck, 2013; Moje et al., 2004). In doing so, there has been a heavy emphasis on CBEs as spaces with more caring relational dynamics to those in schools, and there has been some emphasis on CBEs as spaces using curriculum that is substantively different than that used in schools. However, there has been less attention paid to specific instructional arrangements and dynamics, and how those relate to critical care praxis in teaching. Questions remain about how knowledge is leveraged in instruction and teaching practice in CBE spaces. The second limitation of the literature on community-based education is that it has primarily focused on elements of care operating in organizational and interpersonal levels of interaction. However, there is little literature exploring how youth in programs make meaning about the interactions of care practices in CBE spaces with academic content and instruction. While CBE literature brings systemic tensions for practicing critical care into sharper focus, we still must better understand how critical care praxis relates to the work of instruction.

## Considering Care in Instructional Interactions

In current educational parlance, *instructional* most broadly describes components of education related to content teaching (e.g., a mathematics class is an instructional context). *Non-instructional* most broadly refers to interactions and components of education that lie outside the academic sphere (e.g., recess or lunch times). As scholars have highlighted, teachers regularly engage in work that is not focused on academic content teaching, such as monitoring recess or, perhaps, attending faculty meetings (Parsons et al., 2017; Scriven, 1994). It is tempting to leave the distinction here: instruction happens in interactions around academic content, non-instruction happens in all other interactions, and teachers participate in both. However, the reality is not that neat. Cohen (2011) explained that

> The transmission of knowledge and skills is crucial to everything from housecleaning to high culture, but most of this distinctive activity is carried on in quite ordinary channels. Deliberately practiced teaching is only one modest current in a great sea of informal and often unintended instruction. (p. 24-25)

Instruction, as the transmission of knowledge and skills, ipso facto happens in myriad ways, in myriad settings, and with variable intentions and preparedness—including in "non-instructional" contexts like the playground or the dinner table where there may not be a professional teacher nor whiff of academic curriculum to be found.

Still, practitioners and scholars have surfaced meaningful patterns and particularities in the knowledges, skills, and practices involved with teaching specific content material (McDonald et al., 2013). To some extent, then, the parlance of *instruction* connotes attention to how teachers enact their knowledge and skills—to how they practice their profession (Sherin et al., 2011). KMC is a mathematics program, and as such I see value in taking seriously distinctions between

*instructional* and *non-instructional* contexts. However, KMC is also a community-based education program. The curriculum includes more than mathematics; KMC describes itself as a place where learning occurs "through relationships that are developed and our core practices that take place in a variety of contexts" (KMC website, 2021[4]). Distinguishing what is "instructional" from what is "non-instructional" in KMC is meaningfully different from distinguishing what is "instructional" and what is "non-instructional" in schools. So, in order to situate my study of care, race, and power in the KMC, it is necessary to understand how elements of critical care praxis map onto common educational exchanges, including so-called instructional and non-instructional interactions.

To parse instructional and non-instructional interactions, I rely on the concept of the instructional triangle (also referred to as the instructional dynamic) (Ball & Forzani, 2007; Cohen et al., 2003). I also draw on Ball's (2017) explanation of the "discretionary moments" that occur within the instructional dynamic. After delineating some distinctions between instructional and non-instructional interactions below, I connect these kinds of interactions to elements of critical care praxis. I also highlight mathematics contexts as particular sites for understanding how critical care praxis and instruction may interact with patterns of racism in mathematics education.

**Figure 2.1**

*A re-creation of the instructional triangle (Cohen et al., 2003) with a critical ecological frame (Weissglass, 2002).*

[4] The KMC website is excluded from the final reference list to maintain the anonymity of the program. For inquiries about this citation, please contact the author.

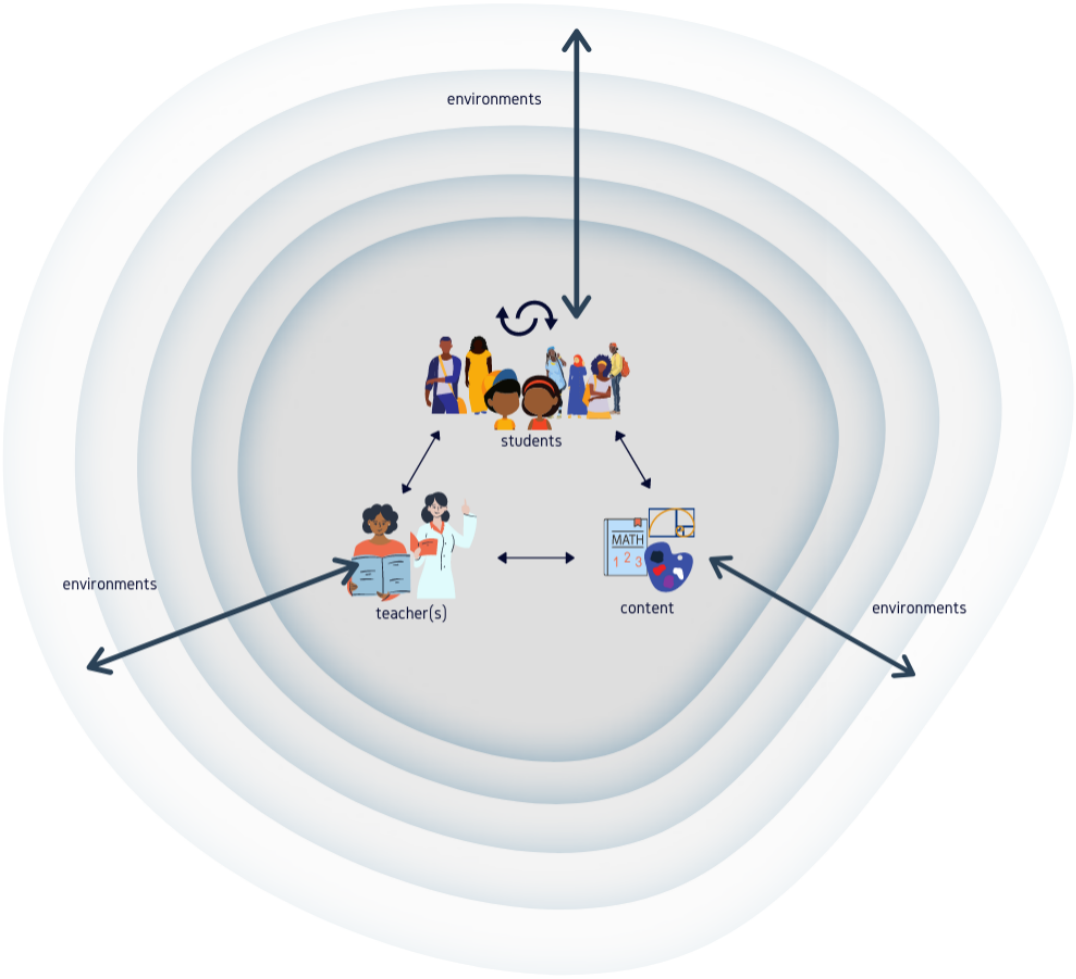



Figure 2.1, above, is a close re-creation of Cohen, et al.'s (2003) instructional triangle—a figure representing the particular dynamics that constitute instruction. This same instructional triangle has been taken up and developed many times—yet Ball and Forzani (2007) ultimately explained that instruction "consists of interactions among teachers, students, and content" (p. 530). They further detailed:

> By interactions, we mean active processes of interpretation that constitute teaching and learning. Teachers interpret and represent subject matter to students, who interpret their teachers, the content, and their classmates and then respond and act. In turn, teachers interpret their students, all of this in overlapping contexts and over time (Lampert, 2001).

> We consider these multiple interactions, which we call the *instructional dynamic*, to be the defining feature of education. (p. 530, emphases original)

With this, we can imagine how the instructional dynamic could model basic interactions in a classroom. For instance, a mathematics teacher may aim to teach students about three basic trigonometric ratios (sine, cosine, and tangent). The teacher and students might interact with and around that content: the teacher explains the ratios, the students do some practice problems, and they discuss answers and processes with one another. While seemingly straightforward, these interactions occur dynamically with other layers of interpretation and interaction, including with contexts (i.e., "environments") outside the immediate physical space of instruction. For instance, my eighth-grade Geometry teacher taught our class the mnemonic SOHCAHTOA (about the ratios of sine, cosine, and tangent vis-à-vis right triangles) by telling us a "joke" with a punchline that evoked a disparaging portrayal of an Indigenous person speaking English. In this case, my teacher, my peers and I, and the content we were learning were all interacting with mathematics in ways that were enmeshed with our interpretations of the sociopolitics of this joke.[5]

Because learners, teachers, and content cannot exist in isolation from the broader world, Ball (2018) noted that including environments in the instructional dynamic is crucial to situating instructional interactions between people in sociopolitical, historical, cultural, and personal contexts. Citing work by Weissglass (2002), Stinson (2013) also argued that research about mathematics teaching and learning should "delve deeper into how the social, political, cultural, and economic discourses of society in general affect the construction of students, teachers, and mathematics" (p. 4). Furthermore, he wrote that only through such work could we consider the

[5] In this particular instance, we were upholding a white, settler-colonial ideology that demeans Indigenous peoples—an ideology that is connected to the U.S.'s specific history of off-reservation boarding schools as a means of advancing the cultural genocide of Native peoples (Lomawaima & Ostler, 2018).

instructional triangle in "proper perspective" (p. 4). So, environments are part of instructional interactions because they are fundamentally part of how teachers and students interpret themselves, one another, and the content, and each other's interpretations. Put simply, every classroom interaction has sociopolitical stakes. With this understanding, Ball (a white, Jewish woman) used her work to highlight how teachers disrupt and/or reinforce racism in the ways that they interpret and interact with content and students (Ball, 2017). Teaching—the deliberate instruction of specific content—therefore involves sociopolitical engagement.

In my re-creation of Ball's revised instructional triangle, I have depicted the environments as a series of layered, interactive concentric shapes. I understand this depiction to be aligned with Ball's theorizing and to also align with critical ecological educational theories that consider systems of power and people's agencies to interact across individual, micro-level contexts and broad, macro-level contexts (Bajaj et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Weissglass, 2002).

Given that community-based education spaces are distinct from schools—even if some closely mimic schools—it is worth considering the makeup of their instructional interactions. As Ball and Forzani (2007) explained, while education is "usually associated with schools," attention to the instructional dynamic as a "metaphor for interactions that take place in many other settings" brings an educational perspective to places and spaces outside of schools (p. 530). Community-based education programs, like KMC, often involve deliberate and structured interaction around content that is not strictly academic (Baldridge et al., 2017). Such content commonly includes cultural enrichment, socioemotional learning, and organized recreational activities (like chess or sports) (Apsler, 2009). So, if as Cohen (2011) wrote, there is a distinction between "deliberately practiced teaching" and the "great sea of informal and often

unintended instruction" (p. 25), then we can distinguish between "instructional" and "non-instructional" contexts in CBE programs differently than we might consider these contexts in schools. CBE spaces certainly involve informal and unintended instruction—the kind of instruction that we would (perhaps confusingly) call "non-instruction" and that would lay outside the instructional triangle or dynamic. However, CBE spaces also may include deliberate and structured teaching around non-academic content. Without conflating all deliberate and structured teaching with professional school teaching, we can use the instructional dynamic to describe the interactions involved in the teaching and learning of non-academic content.

**Critical Care Praxis in Instruction: Altering the Instructional Dynamic**

Youth, educators, and others—including families and communities—can exercise critical care praxis in ways that influence elements of the instructional dynamic, such as curricular content. For example, in a recent incident in a Los Angeles school, Black families advocated for the exclusion of English texts that use the n-word, with the understanding that reading a text that dehumanized Black people would be harmful to their children and may be maleducative to other students in the school's predominantly white student body (Kutner, 2021). In this example, the families practiced critical care by leveraging knowledge (including knowledge of sociopolitical and historical context and of their children's holistic well-being) and actions (including advocacy work that held the school accountable for decentering whiteness in its curricula). Consequently, the family's critical care praxis may have informed the instructional dynamic in many ways.

In Table 2.2, below, I detail three hypothetical outcomes that demonstrate how the parents' efforts could influence instructional interpretations and interactions. In all of these hypotheticals, the originating praxis took place in the "environment" of the instructional dynamic—yet the resulting instructional interactions do not themselves constitute praxis.

**Table 2.2**

*Hypothetical instructional consequences from act of critical care*

*Scenario: A group of Black families raised concerns with the school administration about two English texts that used the n-word.*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ⇩ | ⇩ | ⇩ |
| *Hypothetical Interpretation* | A Black child is aware of his parents' advocacy efforts. He feels like his parents are supporting him and standing up for what's right. | The administration removes the book from the curriculum. Different books take their place. | A white teacher hears about the issue and thinks the parents have made some good points. |
| | ⇩ | ⇩ | ⇩ |
| *Hypothetical Interaction* | The child tells some of his classmates about the situation and they agree that the school should change the curriculum. | The children and teachers use different texts. | The teacher has a serious talk with the students about the inappropriateness of the n-word. |

*Note.* The hypotheticals presented in this table are not meant to represent anti-racist or even skillful responses; rather they are meant to be easily imaginable potential scenarios.

These hypothetical scenarios demonstrate that critical care acts—including those exercised by someone outside of the immediate instructional environment—can influence how people experience, interpret, and interact with themselves, each other, and content. However, they also demonstrate that a single act of critical care does not spark a self-perpetuating chain of praxis. Instead, collective and sustained engagement in critical care praxis—moving toward structural transformation—would need to occur. In order to consider critical care knowledge and actions, and how they may disrupt patterns of racist oppression and privilege in instructional

dynamics, we must consider some of the various ways critical care may inform interactions relevant to race and power between environments and teachers, environments and students, and environments and content. Notably, whether in a school or community-based education program, these interactions occur dynamically and simultaneously in an instructional environment though I am distinguishing between them some in this discussion.

### *Critical Care Praxis Influencing Environments*

In Baldridge's (2019) study of a community-based education program that focused on providing a wide range of programming and support for youth (the majority of whom were Black), she related that the program staff responsible for the college preparation arm of the organization had noticed the youth in the program often struggled to talk about race, ethnicity, and identity—particularly in ways that connected to social relationships and positioning (p. 88). So, the program staff designed a course focused on identity and social issues (p. 87). Baldridge reported that in this course:

> Students would often debate and deconstruct the role of race and ethnicity in their lives, what it meant to be Black and American or Black and Latinx. Students and staff worked through contradictions and processed the realities of living in a racialized society. (p. 88)

By doing this, the CBE program not only served as a site of instructional interaction itself, but it *also* served as a site of critical care praxis operating in youths' outside-of-school environment. The staff enacted critical care praxis in ways that influenced the program's instructional resources (materials, planning, etc.) and content, thereby also influencing how youth and teachers interpreted themselves and each other.

In another out-of-school example, Quek's work highlighted how critical care praxis can influence environments in ways that have observable consequences for the instructional

dynamic. Quek (2021) studied the 2019 Chicago teachers' strike, finding that ethics of care and justice were central to educators' understanding of the circumstances leading up to the strike (their knowledge) and their decisions to strike to improve schooling conditions (their actions). Before the 2019 strike, Quek explained that teachers and students were growing increasingly frustrated with the negative impact of overcrowded classrooms on instruction. With support from their community and youth allies, the 25,000 participating union members achieved a bargaining deal in which the school district agreed to enforce smaller class sizes and guarantee more staffing of social workers and nurses in schools. While occurring outside of immediate instructional interactions, strikers engaged in critical care praxis that ended up benefitting students.

### *Critical Care Praxis Influencing Content*

An example of critical care praxis focusing on influencing content comes from research on mathematics education. Mathematics education researchers have demonstrated how traditional school mathematics curriculum and normative pedagogies harm students of color, and particularly Black students (Beatty, 2018; Martin, 2009a). Battey (2013) explained that mathematics curriculum "has been used to sort students, give access to college, and filter people into higher- and lower-wage work" (p. 332). A growing body of research has investigated opportunities for radical healing and reparation in mathematics (Bullock & Meiners, 2019). Gholson and Robinson (2019) explained their own approach to developing and implementing a curriculum (written by Gholson) that would "restore the relationship between Black learners and mathematics" (p. 348). They wrote: "We believe a form of mathematics therapy centered on reparations and reconciliation...should be integrated into mainstream mathematics curricula to provide communal opportunities for learners to process the inter- and intra-personal demands of mathematics learning" (p. 355). Gholson designed a mathematics curriculum around three kinds

of lessons: “using mathematics for justice, developing positive mathematics identity, and developing mathematics-specific metacognitive skills” (p. 351). Lessons in these categories included activities such as an activity in which students created silhouettes of themselves and documented “the external messages they receive about mathematics and internal messages they tell themselves” (p. 352). Gholson and Robinson’s work demonstrates more than a change to the content of the instructional triangle; it points to how that content would change instructional interactions, including how Black youth make meaning about themselves and the subject matter.

Moreover, while Gholson and Robinson (2019) do not explicitly name their work as critical care praxis, it is demonstrably aligned with elements of praxis. These include knowledge about the sociopolitics of school mathematics, about students’ whole selves, including their racial identities and other aspects of their lived experiences, and of care and justice as co-constitutive in education. This example also showcases how such knowledge was united with action to develop and practice culturally-relevant pedagogy, practice repair, and engage youth as agents of critical care in their own learning.

### *Critical Care Praxis Influencing Students*

Critical care praxis can influence students, including how students interpret and interact with other teachers, students, content, and environments and thus potentially informing their participation in the instructional dynamic. DeNicolo et al. (2017) illustrated how students can engage critical care praxis in ways that influence the instructional dynamic. Reviewing literature on critical care and immigrant youths’ sense of belonging in schools, DeNicolo et al. explained that youth play important roles “in cultivating an emotional sense of belonging and acceptance…[and] provide tangible help with homework assignments, language translation, and orientation” (p. 513). Student-to-student critical care praxis uses cultural and self-knowledge, as

well as youth's situated knowledge of schooling, to inform affirming and community-building relationships.

Another example of critical care praxis influencing students' participation in the instructional dynamic comes from Rolón-Dow's (2005) work studying Puerto Rican girls' experiences of care in middle school. Two of the students leveraged their knowledge related to critical care—particularly of their home community's strengths and of the racism of dominant school—to develop their agency as critical carers. The students, Yanira and Mariah, described how many of their teachers had deficit-based assumptions about the girls' community, including negative perceptions of the students' neighborhood and assumptions that their families did not value education. By authoring a counter-narrative in which they connected the teachers' biased treatment and perceptions to systemic operations of racism, Yanira and Mariah practiced critical care. Moreover, their critical care praxis informed how they understood their teachers' choices and actions in instruction.

### *Critical Care Praxis Influencing Teachers*

Critical care praxis can influence teachers' interpretations and interactions in instruction. Just as Grossman et al. (2009) assert that part of professional knowledge is professional identity, we can consider how critical care praxis informs teachers' understandings and knowledges—including of their own identities and positionalities in instructional settings. Cozart (2010), a Black woman teacher educator and former grade school teacher, explained her own experience embracing her critical knowledge of self, culture, and context and learning how to access that knowledge as a teacher. She explained:

> My miseducation came about because I believed that my schooling was my education and that what I know as a churchgoing, Southern, African American, woman, sister,

> daughter, friend, had little to do with how I would teach. Subconsciously, I valued school knowledge and devalued my cultural knowledge…. In other words, I never raised my cultural education to the level of my schooling until my schooling failed to address my culture's needs and my need to center my culture (p. 30).

Cozart practiced critical care by valuing her cultural knowledge—by recognizing and validating the need she had to center it and the need for it in school. This practice represents many elements of praxis, including knowledge of self, critical reflection, and repair.

**Considering Discretionary Spaces as Sites for Practicing Critical Care**

Given all of the variables and agencies that exist in instructional contexts, critical care praxis in instruction would mean that people draw on their knowledge related to critical care to align their interpretations and interactions with elements of praxis. The micro-moments in which a teacher makes an interpretation and attendant action are what Ball (2018) named "discretionary spaces." For instance, earlier I shared the hypothetical scenarios that could play out in the instructional dynamic related to the real example of Black parents in Los Angeles calling for the exclusion of curricular texts that used the n-word. Other layers of interaction could happen in the moment-to-moment development and interpretation of those scenarios. For instance, the Black boy from my first hypothetical scenario could make a comment in class criticizing the racist characters represented in the text— an in-the-moment interpretation and interactive move. The teacher could interpret his action through a deficit-based, racist lens and respond by diminishing his critique ("It was a different time"). She could also interpret his action through a deficit-based lens and choose not to respond (also a form of interaction). Or, she could interpret his action through a critical care lens and consider how to respond to his comment in a way that not only affirms him personally but furthers the social justice project of which his critique is a part.

Given this conception of discretionary spaces, Ball (2018) argued that, just as teachers have opportunities to disrupt or reinforce patterns of oppression and domination in how they plan resources and activities for instruction, these micro-moments are *also* opportunities. They afford opportunities to "teach in contextually sensitive and culturally responsive ways," as much as they allow opportunities to "enable racism and other forms of oppression to flow into schools" (p. 18). I offer that critical care praxis is a paradigm for analyzing operations of care, race, and power in instruction, as well as a tool for identifying intentionally anti-racist instructional skills. McKinney de Royston et al. (2021) conducted a study of Black teachers' protectiveness of Black students in schools. One Black male teacher they interviewed explained that practicing racial competence, cultural responsiveness, and care in teaching required transformative practice. He said:

> The basic challenges that Black students experience at every single school across the nation, the assimilation of having to curtail your own feelings and your own beliefs and your own way of life and kind of catering it toward a structure that isn't necessarily befitting of the world you come from, you know? I feel like African American families have a different way of being able to show love and different ways of being able to show respect to each other that may not necessarily fit into a classroom. I feel like specifically when you're dealing with the Caucasian teachers, who may have a very traditional way of teaching, even if it does include speaking and being able to pair share, or getting up and being able to move around, there [are] still certain structures within it that doesn't necessarily fit with some African American boys and girls. (p. 85).

Adopting critical care is not only a matter of believing in the knowledge and attempting the actions associated with critical care praxis. Teachers must reckon with their subjective

experiences and knowledge and their positionality in the classroom in order to *do* the work of critical care praxis in teaching.

### Politics of Care, Race, and Power in a Mathematics CBE Program

Critical care praxis in teaching also requires grappling with and seeking to transform content—including, in some particular ways, mathematics. Research about structural racism in mathematics has uncovered how whiteness operates to make mathematics a discipline that is normatively white and masculine (Hottinger, 2016) and reinforcing of white supremacist systems. Leonardo (2009) explained that "...whiteness is not coterminous with the notion that some people have lighter skin tones than others; rather whiteness, along with race, is the structural valuation of skin color, which invests it with meaning regarding the overall organization of society" (p. 92). In other words, whiteness is a system of privileging the values, norms, and ideals associated with white identity. In existing literature, researchers have examined some primary operations of whiteness in mathematics, including what's been described as a racial hierarchy of mathematics (Martin, 2009a) and whiteness as property in mathematics (Battey & Leyva, 2016; Harris, 1993).

A significant way that whiteness has structured school mathematics in the U.S. is through what Martin (2009a) has named the "racial hierarchy of mathematical ability" (p. 315). White supremacy as a onto-epistemology is invested in racialized stereotypes of mathematical abilities. Martin described how, in terms of mathematical ability, both children and adults typically afford Asian and white students higher status than Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students. Peoples' adoption and perpetuation of this specific hierarchy is a function of the dyadic relationship between white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Dumas and ross (2016) explained that anti-Blackness positions Black "as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself

(but not person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and white" (p. 416-417). Thus, some scholars have noted how mathematics education research has tended to adopt white children's "mathematical behaviors and outcomes...as the standard for all children" (Martin, 2012, p. 48) and so assess Black children's mathematical participation in terms of underachievement and inadequate academic performance (Gutiérrez, 2013; Hottinger, 2016). Gholson (2016) further illuminated how Black girls and women are often made invisible in comparative racial analyses of mathematics education. In this way, the hierarchy of mathematics often reinforces intersectional operations of racism and sexism by ignoring Black girls.

As the larger patterns of racial inequities in mathematics suggest, teachers' biases and deficit-frames of Black children's mathematical abilities—and those of other children of color—inform teacher-student interactions. Battey and Leyva (2018) conducted a review of research to identify how teachers' implicit racial biases may operate in their interactions with Black and Latinx mathematics learners. They found that there is substantial evidence suggesting that teachers' implicit racial bias impacts students of color by negatively affecting the quality of teacher instruction, student-teacher relationships, teachers' disciplinary actions and beliefs, and teachers' assumptions about students' aptitudes. Furthermore, they found that implicit racial bias was a factor in studies about racial microaggressions in mathematics classrooms. While they note that there is little mathematics education research that makes implicit bias an object of study, their findings are aligned with extensive research by critical math education scholars documenting the prevalence of deficit-assumptions about Black students and students racialized as brown. Teachers—and especially but not exclusively white teachers—have internalized deficit frames of children and families of color and act accordingly (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). All of these dynamics are relevant in CBE mathematics contexts, too.

Critical care theorists have pointed us towards understanding and engaging the ecological interactions of individual relations with institutional/systemic relations. Research about mathematics education has illuminated these ecological interactions—how children's daily experiences learning mathematics are interactive with systems of anti-Blackness and white normativity. Furthermore, research from community-based educational contexts has shown that even outside of the institutional structures of schooling, systems of oppression and privilege still circulate, shaping organizational operations and contexts as well as interpersonal interactions and personal experiences. While much of the critical care and community-based education research focuses on broader operations of power in education, scholarship detailing the complexities of the instructional dynamic (Cohen et al., 2003; Ball, 2017) invites a closer analysis of how instructional environments consist of opportunities for disrupting systemic oppression and privilege. These conceptual understandings together frame my study of the politics of care, race, and power in the KMC.

## Synthesis and Conclusion

In the previous sections, I have outlined how I see scholarship about critical care praxis, community-based education programs, and instruction and teaching practice articulating with one another. In short, community-based education programs can be understood as unique sites of tension and possibility for critical care praxis. In particular, CBE spaces may provide environmental support and risks for advancing critical care through program content and structures, through attention to healing and actualization, and through the facilitation of critical social capital and relationships. We can also understand how CBE spaces are sites of instruction and teaching practice. In addition to understanding how various people—youth, families, community members, program personnel—can engage critical care praxis in shaping the

instructional dynamic in CBE programs, we can also understand how these programs have particular responsibilities, too. KMC is one such program. In Chapter 3, I detail the design, methodology, and analytical methods I used to conduct a case study of care, race, and power in the Kids Mathematics Coalition.

# Chapter III

## Methodology & Research Design

"When you measure include the measurer."
- MC Hammer (2021)

I undertook my study of KMC with a number of epistemological and methodological commitments that I outline below. First, I start with a vignette that encapsulates how my epistemological and methodological commitments intersected with the act of doing research and show how, as Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) argued, qualitative research is a *process* and not an *event.*

In August 2018, about five weeks into my first summer of data collection, I was wrapping up an interview with Maya Lawson, a Black female college instructor (CI) in KMC. We had an exchange that I have returned to again and again over the past year. It feels fraught with methodological tensions that are central to my study, including issues of my positionality, responsibility, and relationships with participants. As we agreed to tidy the classroom while we finished talking, Maya reflected on her schooling experiences and shared a bit about how she saw my work. She began, "That [the interview] was cool, though. I liked it. [Long, quiet pause]. It's been something about the school system that just wasn't right. And we need people every day to constantly try to figure out what it is, because these kids are suffering every day." I realized that Maya was naming me as one of those people trying to figure out what it is. She also went on to name herself as one of the kids who negotiated the harm and hurt she experienced in school and to name why she thought research about KMC would be meaningful:

> If you are gonna take the opportunity away from me, I'm gonna figure out a way to get it back. And that was what I had to do, my education come first regardless of what y'all got going on. That's kind of what it was for me. And so I busted my butt to learn something before I left out of there. And you know, it is a skill and it's a life lesson that I appreciate, considering that I did learn how to figure it out. But in the same token, it's my education. I didn't feel that I should have been working that hard just to get something that is a right. It's one of my rights. I have a right to an equal education! And it's really hard. So when I see people that are actually trying to figure out how to take this—it only takes one person to be a catalyst for a movement. That's it. Emmett Till was a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. He was one person. It takes one. So I definitely, I appreciate when you guys [visitors, including researchers like me] come around and y'all genuinely want to figure out how to take this [KMC] out of Wayne State [University] and put it, bring it everywhere else. Like I love it! And that's why I have so much respect for DC [Dr. Cohen].

Maya's comments represent one explicit example of how I, too, acted as a subject in this study. As much as I worked to understand my participants' stories and the interactive politics of care, race, and education in the KMC—and to do so with openness and humility—the participants in this study also had perceptions of me and hopes for what story this study might tell. In this chapter, I share details of my commitment to heed Madison's (2006) caution that "the fully embodied struggle to pay attention is a methodological and ethical necessity" (p. 323)—which included, for me, an ongoing wrestling with a dissonance between my epistemological and methodological commitments and the story that, at least in my perception, people in KMC may prefer I tell. Conducting critical qualitative research with integrity means that I must continually

attend to my own positionality as a white, middle class woman researching with a community of Black, Latinx, and Bengali Muslim children, many of whom have lived or are living with poverty. It also means that I must attend to my own positionality vis-à-vis the white male founders of KMC and the larger systems of which KMC is a part. In the sections that follow, I share more about the methodological foundations of my study, what they meant for my study design and methods, their implications for my handling of limitations in my data, and how they have influenced my researcher reflexivity.

### The Politics of Race, Care, and Education in a Community-based Mathematics Program

As stated in Chapter 1, the research questions that guided my inquiry were:

1. How do KMC participants conceive of care and how do the dominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to issues of education and race?
2. How do KMC participants' conceptions of care relate to normative instructional practices and dynamics in the program, particularly those related to mathematics?
3. How do youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences?

## Methodology: Critical Qualitative Inquiry

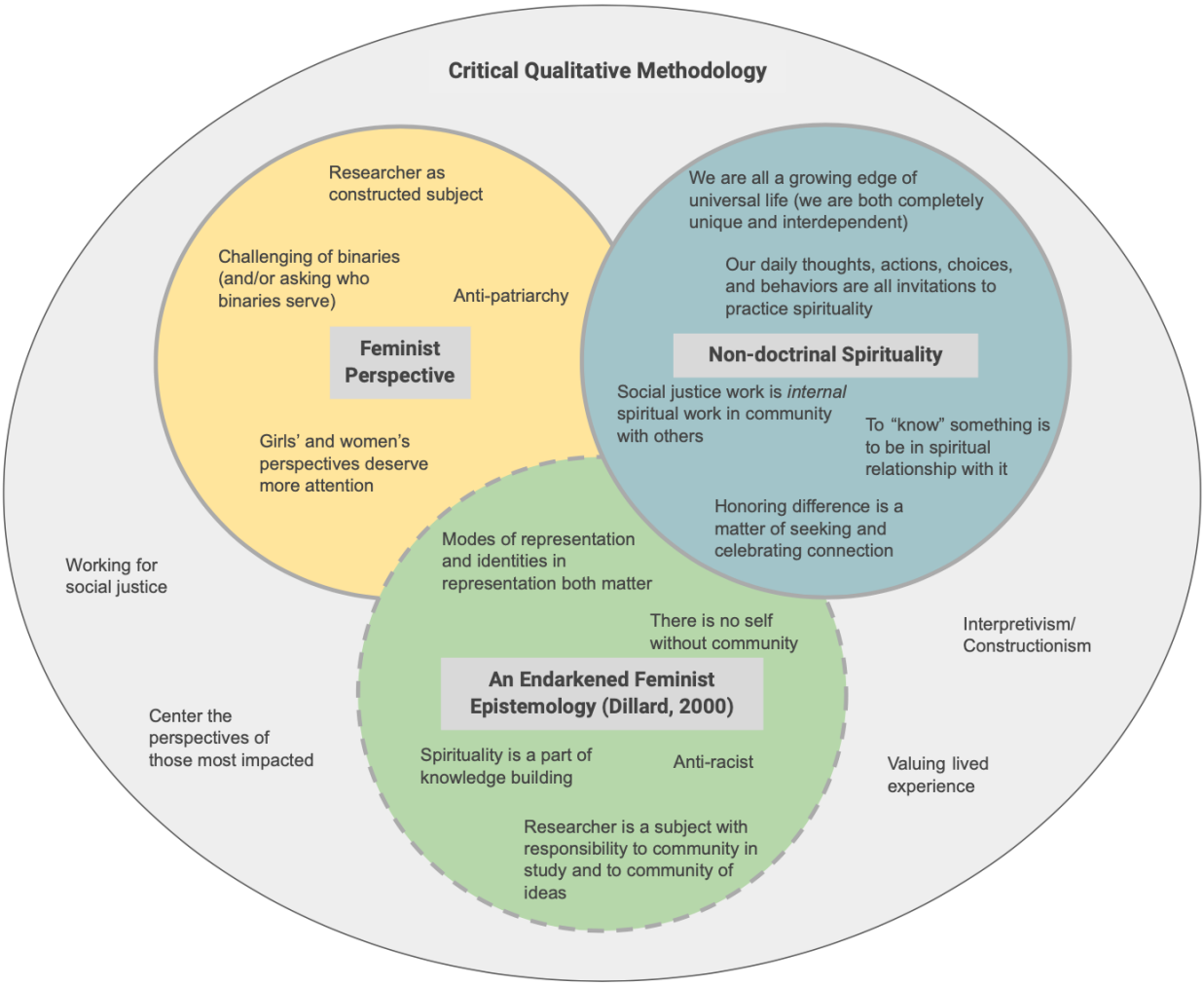
Critical qualitative inquiry brings together my philosophical perspective and the specific methods and study design I crafted to investigate my research questions. Researchers engage qualitative inquiry to pursue questions about "social meanings people attribute to their experiences, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). Oftentimes, qualitative research questions begin with "how" or "why," because they want to understand, describe, or explain processes of meaning-making. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explained that a holistic approach to qualitative inquiry "requires

researchers not to disavow their underlying belief systems but rather to examine how their ontological and epistemological perspectives impact methodology" (p. 7). An epistemology is a belief system about who can generate knowledge and an ontology is a belief system about *what* it is possible to know in this world and *how* it might be possible to know it (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Within the large, incredibly diverse umbrella of qualitative inquiry, critical qualitative inquiry operates from an interpretivist stance. The interpretivist stance is that knowledge does not exist objectively in the world, but that we are all socially constructing knowledge continually and contextually.

Furthermore, critical qualitative inquiry takes the perspective that social structures of power imbue all facets of our daily lives, including our meaning-making processes (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). So, broadly, my methodological approach was one that relied on an understanding that all people are continually- and socially-constructing meaning in the context of a world structured by the operations of power. Critical qualitative researchers and theorists have expounded on what ontological and epistemological premises underlie a critical stance. Core premises of critical qualitative research that I take up include interpretivism (sometimes called constructionism), a value for lived experience as a basis for wisdom and knowledge, the aim of doing research work to advance social justice, and the belief that researchers should center the voices of people most impacted by the phenomenon they are researching. In the next section, I outline three specific, critical theoretical perspectives—feminist theory, non-doctrinal spirituality, and an endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000)—that informed my methodology (see Figure 3.1, below). I also share some of the implications of what it means for me, as a white, middle class woman to take up these particular epistemologies.

**Figure 3.1**

*Epistemological and Methodological Commitments*




**Non-doctrinal Spirituality**

I group a number of my operating epistemological premises under an umbrella of non-doctrinal spirituality. While I have my own personal, religious beliefs and practices, I consider non-doctrinal spirituality to be a broader perspective that does not require specific faith-based religion or doctrine. Instead, non-doctrinal spirituality involves humanist precepts about how to live ethically in community with the world around us, including in our research work. For me, these precepts include that we all represent a particular *growing edge* (Palmer & Newcomer,

2020) of universal life. This means that each person and each person's life is extraordinary and unique—pushing and shaping the set of experiences that make up existence—*and* that each person is part of a matrix of interdependent life. A second precept of non-doctrinal spirituality is that we can honor and celebrate differences as affirmations of common humanity (rather than perceiving differences as barriers to common humanity). Honoring difference includes cultivating community practices for accountability and repair; it does not mean tolerating dehumanizing perspectives on difference. A third precept is that everything is spiritual work, including the act of knowing. As Palmer (1993) explained, true knowing "requires the knower to become interdependent with the known" (p. 32). This idea means that knowing involves spiritual and material responsibility. Finally, the non-doctrinal spirituality I draw upon asserts that social justice work is *internal* spiritual work that we do in community (and with accountability to and support of) others. This final precept is important in distinguishing non-doctrinal spirituality from colonial religious projects. Colonial religiosity has operated from an assumption that some people (believers) were morally superior to other people (non-believers). Non-doctrinal spirituality does not operate with this assumption. Instead, non-doctrinal spirituality frames social justice work as the work of making your own position in the world more just in relationship to others.

**Feminist and Endarkened Feminist Epistemologies**

While feminist ideological perspectives are diverse, theorists have established some typically common aspects of a feminist epistemology and ontology. One of these norms includes challenging binary categorizations that serve as mechanisms of power. For example, Burton (1995) wrote about how androcentric approaches to mathematics have contributed to the western framing of mathematics as a domain of objective, positivist knowledge. However, Burton

explains that a feminist epistemology can allow us to see the "recognition and celebration of different approaches, particularly to styles of thinking" (p. 287) in mathematics. A second norm is placing some especial value on girls' and women's perspectives—not in an essentializing way, but in a way that actively attempts to counter the dominance of male-centered knowledge production. A third norm of a feminist perspective is viewing the researcher as a subject in the study whose presence should be engaged thoughtfully and reflexively (Moss & Haertel, 2016).

I generally value a feminist epistemology and I am also skeptical of the capacity of a broad feminist epistemology to serve racial justice. As Denzin (2017) noted, even while critical scholars—feminist scholars included—have been committed to qualitative research as a means for social justice, "often the understandings of these programs are based on or bear little relationship to the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the persons they are intended to serve" (p. 12). Furthermore, Black feminist and womanist scholars have forged a feminism based in the knowledges, wisdoms, experiences, and perspectives of Black women of color in particular (Collins, 2000). Black feminist theory is not mine, as a white woman, to adopt. Instead, I have sought the integration of a feminist perspective and a non-doctrinal spirituality in my research that guides my responsiveness to Black feminism and other standpoint feminisms. My work is influenced by Dillard's (2000) conception of an endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE). In particular, I use Dillard's assumptions of EFE to question how my epistemological frame can be responsive to Black women's feminisms, spiritualities, and knowledge.

Dillard (2000), a Black female qualitative researcher, outlined core principles and assumptions of an endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE). The first assumption she named is that our responsibilities to our communities and the communities in our work are defined by our own cultural and social identities. This first assumption works in tandem with the second

assumption: that researchers are responsible to the community from which they define their beliefs and principles of inquiry. This second assumption has influenced me to attend to the fact that I draw on Black feminism and knowledge and scholarship traditions around critical care and racial justice in my work. Moreover, it has pushed me to consider the particular responsibilities I have to engage that work respectfully from my own positionality. The third assumption Dillard named is that research is as much a spiritual pursuit as it is an intellectual pursuit. I see my use of a non-doctrinal spirituality as resonant with this particular aspect of EFE, while still acknowledging the differences in spiritual backgrounds, histories, and communities that inform my spiritual self and Dillard's. Still, it was Dillard's framework that helped me make explicit my own value for attending to emotions, engaging empathy, and being vulnerable in research work. The fourth assumption of EFE is that "only within the context of community does the individual appear and, through dialogue, continue to become" (p. 675). In my work, this assumption has pushed me to consider how I can represent people (myself included) and communities as continually evolving. Dillard's fifth assumption of an endarkened feminist epistemology is that research, and knowledge more generally, are deeply connected to history and to the world outside the researcher. We cannot undertake inquiry with assumptions about our research being isolated from the world before or around us. One way I responded to this assumption in my own work in an observable way was by including dialogue between me and people in my research when possible and salient, rather than excluding my participation in conversations. The final assumption that Dillard outlined is that "an endarkened feminist epistemology has as its research project the vigilant and consistent desire to 'dig up' the nexus of racial/ethnic, gender, and other identity realities" (p. 678). This last assumption holds my feminist epistemology to account for

being intersectional, and for continuing to take a humility-based stance to both pushing *and* understanding the bounds of my scholarship.

A critical qualitative research methodology was appropriate for my study because, at their core, my research questions were about how social meanings are made and remade through specific interactions in a power-laden context. Feminist and non-doctrinal epistemologies, influenced and provoked by Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology, provided the philosophical bases for my research design and decision-making. Specifically, acknowledging an endarkened feminism—a Black feminist way of knowing and being—means that (a) I consciously bounded and situated my analyses and interpretations within my own positioned epistemology as a white woman and (b) that I looked and continue to look for ways to grow and challenge my positioned epistemology to be responsive to Black feminist knowledge and ethics. In the sections that follow, I share my specific study design and methods and demonstrate how they were informed by these epistemological and methodological foundations.

## Research Design: Ethnographic Case Study

Case study design is appropriate for investigating how social phenomena operate in a particular, bounded context. Dyson and Genishi (2005) explained that "[i]t is the messy complexity of human experience that leads researchers to case studies in the qualitative...tradition" (p. 3). By focusing on a specific case of something, the researcher hopes to "gain insight into some of the factors that shape, and the processes through which people interpret or make meaningful" (p. 3) a specific phenomenon. The social phenomenon—the "something" being studied—can be broad or narrow, as long as the context in which it is studied is bounded and specific. In the case of my study, the social phenomenon I investigated was how the politics of race, care, and education interacted in the context of a community-based education

program. In particular, I analyzed KMC as the "unit" encapsulating these interactions. Ultimately, the program provided bounding and grounding for my conceptual exploration of care as it pertains to race and education. Dyson and Genishi explained that each case study has a foreground and a background. The foreground is the phenomenon (the sociopolitics of race, care, and education) and the background is the context (KMC's program in Detroit). The background consists of the particular issues that make the research compelling. In my study, the background has had three main parts. First is the epistemological gap between dominant, white feminist care theories in education and theories of critical care. Second is KMC's status as an out-of-school education context that has different institutional origins, affordances, and constraints than a traditional school setting. Third is the telescoping interactivity of individuals and systems, and how instructional contexts are sites where we can see the macro in the micro.

Western academics have historically used ethnography in ways that reify settler-colonial and white supremacist ideologies. Typically, an ethnographer (positioned as an objective outsider) would reside among a community (positioned as the Other) for an extensive period of time and document cultural practices and behaviors in ways that privileged and elevated whiteness. Moss & Haertel (2016) pointed out that "feminist and ethnic studies scholars call for ethnography to address concerns about the ways in which conventional studies of 'culture' can essentialize and stereotype, ignoring within group variations and leaving little room for understanding agency" (p. 143). I share these concerns. Furthermore, case study design poses similar risks of the researcher essentializing and othering participants. With dedicated attention to the risks of reproducing oppressive research patterns, I chose to use an ethnographic case study design. This design allowed me to use ethnographic methods like interviewing, participant-observation, and artifact collection to gain multiple perspectives across multiple types of daily

settings and activities. It also combined the case study and ethnographic practices of "gaining entry," in which I had to gain on-going consent and definition of boundaries across all the varying groups of participants, settings, and activities of my research. For example, while I had access to participant-observations in senior staff meetings, in the fifth week of my observation, a senior staff member stopped the meeting to ask that I not take notes about a particular discussion that contained sensitive details about students. Case study research centers "the messy complexity of human experience" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3) by looking across various sources of information and perspectives and honoring how they may be similar and different. Furthermore, Dillard's (2000) notion that there is no self without community informs my understanding of case study research as a way to examine how collective and individual meaning-making operate together. So, my choice of case study design was responsive to both my research questions and to my methodological foundations. Case study design allowed me to actively involve my participants in meaning-making during research and afterward in order to iteratively collect and analyze data, to practice reflexivity, and to pay careful attention to the sociopolitical and historical contexts of my study.

**Data Sources: Site Selection, Participants, and Modes of Engagement**

The KMC is a unique context in several important ways that made it a compelling site for a case study. Qualitative researchers often use purposive sampling, also sometimes referred to as judgment sampling (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In a case study, sampling occurs within the bounds of the site itself. Within the context of KMC, I wanted to be sure that I drew upon data from a variety of people, places, and interactions. Patton (1990) explored various strategies for conducting purposive sampling, but wrote that all purposive sampling is meant for "selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth" (p. 169). In my study, I have used purposive sampling

in my selection of KMC as a site of study, in my selection of places and spaces for participant-observation, and in requesting participant interviews. As Patton defined it, a researcher using theory-based purposive sampling identifies "incidents, slices of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (p. 177). My selections of participants and data events/artifacts were informed by theoretical wonderings about youths' meaning-making about care and race and about systemic operations of care and neglect in education.

Over the first week of my research with the KMC, I conducted exploratory participant-observation in order to gain a sense of the structure and demographics of the program. I confirmed my understanding that all of the students in the KMC identified as Black, Latinx, and/or Bengali Muslim. Furthermore, all college instructors (CIs) in KMC identified as Black, Bengali Muslim, or Asian-American. I also found that while the KMC operated in groups split by grade-level and led by designated college students, the program also allowed for many circumstances—both formal and informal—in which all students were engaged together or in which various groupings of students and staff combined. Given all of this, I chose to use selective, purposive sampling in my participant-observation with the aim of engaging across all places and spaces in the program to some extent, and focusing on some places and spaces more immersively (see Table 3.1, below, for specific breakdowns of participant-observation contexts). Namely, I spent most of my participant-observation time with rising 7th- and 8th-graders across their program spaces. However, I still spent considerable time with rising 9th-grade students and with TA/PA classes (classes of rising 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-grade students). Of my participant-observation of in classroom contexts, I focused 16-hours of participant-observation on general instructional arrangements in classes taught by four different instructors (Mr. James, Dr. Jordan,

Mr. Lowell, and Ms. Bianchi). I also observed senior staff meetings, grade-level and whole-program TA/PA staff meetings, whole-program assemblies and lunches, and mixed-grade and mixed-role participation in extracurricular activities like dance, chess, and homework help.

**Table 3.1**

*Breakdown of participant-observation data by specific program context*

| **Program Context** | **Hours of Participant-Observation** |
|---|---|
| 7th-grade mathematics classes | 12 |
| 8th-grade mathematics classes | 12 |
| 9th-grade mathematics classes | 8 |
| TA/PA mathematics classes | 10 |
| Team times | 12 |
| Grade-level TA/PA debriefings | 6 |
| Family debriefings | 10 |
| Senior staff meetings | 18 |
| Assemblies, family meals, all-program events | 18 |
| Non-math program activities | 4 |
| Extracurricular activities | 2 |
| **TOTAL** | **112** |

My goal was to build deeper familiarity with some students and group dynamics while also gaining an understanding of the wider operations of the program. Overall, I relied on my methodological values for honoring difference and heterogeneity in experiences to diversify my data selection. As I discuss more in Chapters 4 and 5, KMC programmatic discourses constrained public dialogue about race generally, and particularly about race in ways involving

sociopolitical critique (Roberts, 2010). While I paid attention to youths' and adults' more implicit engagement with politics of race and identity, including religion and gender, my data collection around participants' subjective experiences was limited. These limitations are reflected in my own curtailed racial analysis about the particular significance of participants' subjectivities in their meaning-making and interactions.

I used several practices to receive the consent of participants in my study. First, the director of the KMC asked every KMC participant (student and staff) if they would consent to my participation, including my note-taking and participant-observation. After consent was given for my general presence, I sought verbal consent from individual students and groups of students when I was in their presence. While not a part of my formal consent process, I was aware that my presence as a white woman researcher was inevitably imposing a white gaze and adult presence on spaces that may otherwise have been free of both of those things. As students got to know me, I would often respond to student invitations to engage and observe with them. Equally, I worked to honor when students did not want me either present or taking notes. I also sought permission from each of the adult instructors whose spaces I entered. For interviews, I gained written and verbal consent to interview and audio-record each interview. When the interviewee was a child, I obtained both their assent and a guardian's written consent to interview and audio-record them (see Appendix 1 and 2 for youth and adult interview protocols, respectively).

These consent processes were a product of my decision-making about how to translate my methodological commitments into practice. For example, when I was originally working with the KMC administration to explore the possibility of doing research with them, some of the white senior staff expressed reservations about my desire to ask children questions that explicitly named race. Because children's experiences of race and racism are central to my inquiry, I

negotiated with these staff members to be sure that I could ask about race—albeit in a way that was far less direct than was my preference.[6] Additionally, I also reflected about what my responsibilities were in bringing up race in varying interview dynamics—i.e. as a white woman interviewing a child of color versus as a white woman interviewing another white adult. In interviews with children, before asking about race, I would often say something like, "I would like to ask you a question about race. I know I'm white and an adult, but I hope you know that I am open to absolutely anything that you have to say. The point of this interview is to learn from you, so I don't want you to hold back as long as you're comfortable. Is it OK if I ask the question?" There is no definitive way to know if this kind of prefacing helped mitigate any student hesitations or reluctance, but choosing to say it fulfilled a secondary methodological commitment of transparently reckoning with my identities and position relative to the people and communities in my study.

I requested interviews with various students based on a combination of purposive techniques. Namely, I sought to interview some students who seemed like they may be outliers in terms of their KMC participation and experiences and some who seemed to be more mainstream. I also sought to interview some students from various ethno-racial, religious, and gender identities. My ability to analyze and make claims about how students' subjectivities informed their perspectives and interactions with others was constrained by the limitations of my data. Researchers have highlighted numerous ways that students' racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and religious identities all have particular relations to and positions within systems of privilege and oppression. I have chosen to name participants' identities with an eye toward how

[6] The specific wording we agreed to was, "Has KMC ever been a place where you have expressed any particular parts of your identity (such as gender identity, racial identity, or cultural identity)?" Then, if children named race, I could follow up with more questions.

various parts of their identities are often racialized within the context of U.S. anti-Blackness and xenophobia. So, while Latinx, Black, and Bengali Muslim students do not share the same sociocultural and political histories and contexts, I do consider that children in all of these groups are regularly racialized as Black and brown and interact with education systems from those racialized positions. In Detroit, particularly, I also know that ethnic- and racial-segregation persists, with roots in white supremacist redlining, restrictive covenants, xenophobia, and anti-Blackness (Sugrue, 1996). As I was not allowed to ask students about their economic circumstances, I did not consider economic class in my requests. However, many students volunteered information (directly and indirectly) about economic class, and I sought to be responsive and open to whatever sharing they initiated.

There were important similarities and differences among KMC participants along axes of school enrollment, age and grade-level, racial and/or racialized identities, and familial connections with the program. I sought to interview students who attended a variety of schools and lived in a variety of neighborhoods in Detroit, students who had familial ties to the program and those who did not, and students who seemed to engage differently in their mathematics classes (e.g. with perceived extroversion or introversion, excitement or reluctance).

**The Participants**

The 17 people whose voices and stories are excerpted in this dissertation are a diverse group in terms of age, racial and ethnic identity, education backgrounds, religion, and socioeconomic status. Of course, these dimensions of identity do not capture each person's uniqueness or their wholeness and it is not possible for me to share anything more than partial stories of people in this study. In describing the participants and their involvement with the KMC program, my aim is to provide a more detailed picture of the similarities and differences in their

positionalities within the program and communities. These details informed how I triangulated interview data with participant-observation and artifact data to determine what understandings of care, race, and instruction were commonly held in the program and what understandings were not.

**"The Kids": Hailey, Raven, Zacarias, Deon, Basirah, Carlotta, Marisha, and Jordan**

Youth in the KMC who were rising seventh-, eighth, and ninth-graders—but particularly the seventh- and eighth-graders—were often collectively referred to as "the kids." The term delineates them from other youth participants who, in addition to taking classes, are employed by KMC as near-peer mentors to the "kids." While I originally held some worry that some of the kids (especially the older ones) would feel demeaned by being labeled "kids," I learned over time both that (a) most youth took up the language and used it without negative connotation or taking other issue with it and (b) the delineation of "kids" from other roles was connected to how the kids themselves understood and experienced care (something I describe more in Chapter 4). Overall, I interviewed youth who were members of six of the 12 "teams."

Of the youth I interviewed and whose voices I share in this study, two were entering seventh grade, five were entering eighth grade, and one was entering ninth grade. Hailey Sanders, Raven Anderson, Carlotta Thompson, Jordan Cummings, and Marisha Kidd identified as Black girls, Basirah Wastim identified as a Bengali Muslim girl, Zacarias Carrera identified as a Latino boy, and Deon Barney identified as a Black boy (see Table 3.2). They attended different schools, except for Raven and Deon, who had attended school together their entire childhoods—although I did not know they were friends until after I interviewed them. While the kids had diverse experiences in schools and in the KMC program, and each shared parts of their unique personalities, ideas, and lives with me, they also shared some significant similarities in terms of

their positionality within the program. First, all but one of the kids had an existing family connection with the program (and/or a connection through close friends they identified as extended family). The only student who did not identify any previous family involvement with the program, Marisha, said her mom was responsible for learning about KMC and getting her involved. Second, all of them except for one girl, Jordan, had grown up in Detroit and attended schools in Detroit their whole lives. Jordan attended her early elementary schooling in Detroit before transferring to attend elementary, middle, and high school in Plymouth Canton Community Schools (a district in the metropolitan Detroit area). Third, all of the kids identified KMC as a generally positive experience and program where kids typically felt cared for by each other, their near-peer mentors, and adults. However, I do discuss important nuances and variations in their perspectives of the program in later chapters. Four of the kids said they had gone to the same school their entire lives at the time of the interview (Hailey, Raven, Brandon, and Carlotta). The other four kids—Zacarias, Basirah, Marisha, and Jordan—all shared that their past or planned movement between schools was related to some sort of negative experience in their school(s) and/or the pursuit of better educational opportunities. As mathematics learners, Basirah and Jordan both identified themselves as advanced learners. Marisha, Carlotta, Zacarias, Deon, Raven, and Hailey all expressed some enjoyment or appreciation for mathematics learning and made particular mention that they felt their mathematics learning in the program was helpful to them in school.

When deciding who to interview, I considered what I had observed about many of the students so far. With some care to forefront that I was operating based on my subjective impressions, I attempted to ask youth to participate who had struck me as quite different from one another and whose interactions in the program also seemed to be variable.

***Hailey, Raven, Carlotta, Basirah, & Marisha.*** Hailey was extremely quiet—although not exactly shy. I noted that she would sometimes volunteer in class, and that I never saw her unaccompanied by friends outside of class. Hailey seemed to me to be a fairly consistent rule-follower; I documented several instances when she led her peers in heeding adults' instructions and expectations. I observed teachers in the program comment on her positivity and niceness. I also heard older students, in conversation with one another, name her as a good role model for her peers. In contrast, I had heard some senior staff identify Raven as having some behavioral issues and knew that she had been involved in a rules infraction early in the first year of camp. I also observed Raven consistently speak in high volume; I recall that even her whispers during class one day were more audible than Hailey's regular speaking voice. I worried that her boisterousness made her particularly vulnerable to patterns of racialized and gendered malignment of Black girls in schools (Morris, 2015). Early on, I had interacted with Raven more than I had with many other students, and I really liked her. Carlotta was someone I interacted with the very first day. I observed her regularly talking to adults in the program (myself included), and she appeared to take on an informal role offering guidance to others who were new to the program. Carlotta also was very open in our early, informal conversations about some traumatic events she experienced and how her experience in KMC was related to how she had responded to those events. Carlotta tended to be more prominent in the social milieu of KMC, even across grade-level groups. Basirah was similarly ubiquitous, although her presence was more consistently notable in grade-level interactions and in her interactions with College Instructors and adult staff. I noted that, in a senior staff meeting, some College Instructors shared the opinion that Basirah was so intent on excelling and receiving praise for her participation in the program that she often ended up not paying attention to how her participation might be

negatively impacting others. Basirah frequently volunteered in math classes, and in an informal conversation we had, she detailed the dozens of school and extracurricular activities in which she had participated. While I later learned that Marisha, too, had participated in an impressive number of activities, I have no record or memory of having met her until the third week of the program. Once I did introduce myself to her, though, I realized that she was often present in various participant-observation contexts. Overall, I saw Marisha as being relatively reserved, with a serious and studious affect—but with her peers, away from adults and outside of class, she opened up a bit and was much more prone to flashing her quick and brilliant smile.

***Zacarias, Deon, & Jordan.*** Zacarias was one of the few Latinx boys in his grade level, and had older siblings in KMC. He was regularly social and always eager to play organized sports during Thursday lunch. My impression of Zacarias in various situations—during assemblies, in classes, with his peers in unstructured time—was of someone who was generally very laidback and even-keeled. Deon, in my experience, was not so even-keeled. I first met Deon in a mathematics class when he was staunchly refusing to do the assigned activity. He had his arms crossed and was glaring at the teacher. We began to chat and he shared that he was in a bad mood and alluded to not liking this particular teacher, but as we chatted more, Deon's spirits seemed to visibly lift. A week later, his CI found me in the hallway and asked if I could talk to him. According to her, Deon was in a dark mood again and she remembered that he had felt better after talking to me the week before. Over the next weeks, I developed an impression of Deon as a sensitive boy who was easily hurt by others' slights (intentional or not). He also cared deeply for other people, including his CI and peers, and was often happy and in high spirits, too. Of all the younger kids I interviewed, I was most aware of Jordan as someone who seemed to operate on the social margins in KMC. During whole program lunches, she would often sit alone

and practice writing Japanese *kanji* or read a book while her peers nearly always socialized during that time. I also observed her being antagonized by a couple of ninth-grade boys who made fun of her neurodevelopmental disorder. Although she did not seem to pay any attention to it, I worried and wondered how she was experiencing their treatment. Jordan completely her classwork quickly, and then would often chat with her TA or read a book. While I often saw her laugh and appear happy, I did not identify people besides her TA with whom she seemed to be particularly close.

**Table 3.2**

*Basic information about seventh-, eight-, and ninth-grade interviewees*

| Name | Grade | Gender | Race or Ethnicity | Team in MC | Years in MC | Family in MC | School Neighborhood |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hailey Sanders | 7 | Girl | Black | Team 2 | 1 | Yes (sister) | Grand Meyer (Westside) |
| Raven Anderson | 7 | Girl | Black | Team 1 | 1 | Yes (mom) | Briggs |
| Zacarias Carrera | 8 | Boy | Latino | Team 5 | 2 | Yes (siblings) | Southwest |
| Deon Barney | 8 | Boy | Black | Team 6 | 2 | Yes (sibling) | Briggs |
| Basirah Wastim | 8 | Girl | Bengali | Team 5 | 2 | Yes (family friends) | Hamtramck |
| Carlotta Thompson | 8 | Girl | Black | Team 5 | 2 | Yes (mom) | Highland Park |
| Marisha Kidd | 8 | Girl | Black | Team 8 | 2 | No | Grosse Pointe Park |
| Jordan Cummings | 9 | Girl | Black | Bridge 2 | 1 | Yes (mom) | Plymouth-Canton |

*Note.* Seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade student interviewees. KMC participants, including these students, often refer to youth in these grade levels as "kids" or "the kids."

### The Teaching Assistants (TAs): Chandira, Chokri, Mahalia, and Owen

I interviewed four teaching assistants over the course of my data collection: Chandira Nazmul, a Bengali Muslim girl, Chokri Amin, a Bengali Muslim boy, Mahalia King, a Black girl, and Owen Danjuma, a Black boy (see Table 3.3). Chandira, Owen, and Mahalia all attended Renaissance High School, one of Detroit's highly-competitive examination schools. Chokri

attended International Academy in Troy, Michigan, a suburb in metropolitan Detroit. Chandira also previously attended International Academy until high school. All of the TAs I interviewed except for Mahalia were rising eleventh-graders at the time of our interview; Mahalia was a rising twelfth-grader. While Chokri and Mahalia both heard about KMC through friends, Owen and Chandira both became involved with the program after their elder sisters had themselves participated as TAs. All four TAs were effusive about the program and described it as a space where they consistently experienced and enacted care. Two of the TAs, Chokri and Owen, each offered a more nuanced evaluation of the mathematics content in the program, saying that it was generally strong and interesting for most students but that they each felt that the content was not particularly challenging for them or other "more advanced" students. Chandira and Mahalia did not share an appraisal of the mathematics content in the program. I discuss data related broader mathematics teaching and learning in Chapter 5.

It seemed to me that Chandira and Mahalia were both consistently social and talkative among the TAs, including in large groups, whereas Chokri and Owen seemed to be consistently social in smaller groups and a bit more reserved in all-TA meetings. Over the time of my observation, I spotted Chandira with various friend groups, whereas the other three TAs—while not unfriendly—tended to have more defined social groups. My interactions with Chandira before asking her if she would agree to an interview mostly consisted of her saying "hi" and smiling if we passed each other. However, on two occasions, she also stopped me to share a compliment about my clothing and my hair. Both times, she was effusive—and apparently genuine—in her delivery. Later, Chandira shared with me that she felt happier when she complimented other people and so she made it a regular practice. Mahalia also seemed to be quite friendly; she described herself as "bubbly" and seemed to have good rapport with other

TAs and senior staff. Mahalia also gave me the impression of being no nonsense about some things. For instance, I think she maintained high expectations for her two students. I observed one student trying to get out of doing more practice problems one afternoon and Mahalia said plainly, but not unkindly, "You can be done when you stop rushing and making silly mistakes." In between noticeable moments of contemplation, Mahalia spoke rapidly and with great animation. Chokri also sometimes gesticulated, but he rarely participated in class or spoke up in all-TA meetings. I observed him work with his students diligently during team times and in their mathematics classes, but in his own mathematics classes, he would often sit in the back of the room and talk with his classmates about other topics. Chokri told me that he likely would not return to KMC the following year because he desperately wanted to study abroad over the summer in a high school student exchange program. In part, he said, this was because he really liked learning about other cultures and languages. Owen, meanwhile, was sometimes an enigma to me. He seemed very well-regarded by his peers, many of whom would greet him and pay careful attention when he spoke in all-group events. He also was one of the only people to whom a particularly shy seventh-grader would talk. I saw the two of them—and eventually a few more boys—playing Yu-Gi-Oh!, a Japanese collectible card trading game. Owen also often spoke at morning assemblies, delivering jokes on behalf of his team for their morning roll-call routine. His voice would sometimes be shaky; to me, he seemed nervous at times. However, particularly as camp went on, he seemed to gain confidence and particularly enjoy telling pun-based jokes that elicited heavy groans from his peers.

**Table 3.3**

*Basic information about interviewees who were Teaching Assistants (TAs)*

| Name | Grade | Gender | Race or Ethnicity | Team in MC | Years in | Family in MC | School Neighborhood |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | MC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chandira Nazmul | 11 | Girl | Bengali | Team 8 | 1 | Yes (sister) | Greenfield |
| Chokri Amin | 11 | Boy | Bengali | Team 3 | 1 | Friend | Troy |
| Mahalia King | 12 | Girl | Black | Bridge 3 | 2 | Friend | Greenfield |
| Owen Danjuma | 11 | Boy | Black | Bridge 3 | 2 | Yes (sister) | Greenfield |

**The Senior Staff: Maya, Marcel, Jamal, Alyssa, and Bob**

Maya Lawson and Marcel Johnson were both CIs in the KMC program at the time of my study. Maya, a young Black woman and a recent graduate of Renaissance High School, was going to enroll in an undergraduate engineering program at a state university in the upcoming fall. Maya was in her fifth year in the program, having first joined KMC as a Bridge student (going into 9th grade) before returning in subsequent years as a TA. Marcel, a young Black man entering his third year in a teaching program at a state university, had participated in KMC for 9 years, first as a student, then as a student-staff, and then as a CI. Maya first heard about the KMC from a close friend—now a fellow CI—who encouraged her to join the program. Marcel got involved with KMC as the eighth sibling in his family to participate in the program; all seven of his older brothers had participated in some capacity before him. Maya seemed to be a prominent leader among the CIs. Even though it was her first year in the program, she was quick to share her perspective in senior staff meetings. The younger kids also responded to her in ways that seemed to communicate her almost maternal/aunt-like status. For instance, after another Black CI was having a hard time getting the eighth-grade students to listen to her instructions, Maya entered the room and within seconds had all the children quiet and lined up. She told me later that she thought of those moments as opportunities to teach kids about being aware of how their actions mattered to other people. Marcel commanded a similar kind of ready following from the younger kids. While I always observed him being soft-spoken and calm in his interactions, he

sometimes recounted memories of his own time as a kid in the program and laughed about his own youthful behaviors.

Jamal Ocasio and Alyssa Brown were both grade-level supervisors in the program at the time of our interviews (Jamal for the Bridge teams and Alyssa for the Grade Seven teams). Jamal, a Black man, and Alyssa, a Black woman, had both first joined the program as rising seventh-graders. After working as KMC student-staff and as a CI for five years, Jamal became a grade-level supervisor. The year I interviewed him, he had been with the program for 15 years. Outside of the program, Jamal was nearing completion for his master's degree in mathematics at Wayne State University. As part of his graduate studies, he also taught undergraduate mathematics classes at the college. At the time of our interview, Alyssa was a high school mathematics teacher in Detroit and was completing her doctorate in education. After working away from the program for several years, Alyssa had returned to the program as grade-level supervisor and said that she hoped to remain involved indefinitely moving forward. As grade-level supervisors, Alyssa and Jamal debriefed with their teams' TAs and PAs each day, helped cover extracurricular activities, oversaw some elective courses, and led certain rituals at all-program events like assemblies (e.g. participating in the Weekly Joke skit on Wednesday, or creatively sharing grade-level teams' weekly homework and participation rates, called "the 10s and Stars," on Thursdays).

Bob Lowell, a white man, was the associate director of KMC and a co-founder of the program. A mathematician and college instructor, Lowell was from Detroit and was an alum of Cass Technical High School. After high school, Lowell studied mathematics—including Socratic instruction methods for teaching conceptual mathematics content—in Berkeley, California. Then, he moved back to Detroit and worked with Detroit Public Schools supporting conceptual

mathematics teaching. Participants in KMC know Lowell as a co-founder of the program, but he was also known for always teaching the 7th-grade Calculus ("discovery math") classes. In all-program assemblies, KMC founder and director Thomas Cohen referred to Lowell as Team Aleph-Nought (the term for the cardinality of the set of all natural numbers) when conducting the roll call. See Table 3.4 for summary information about the College Instructor and Senior Staff interviewees.

**Table 3.4**

*Basic information College Instructor (CIs) and Senior Staff interviewees*

| Name | Role | Gender | Race or Ethnicity | Team in MC | Years in MC | Family in MC | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maya Lawson | CI | Woman | Black | Team 2 | 5 | No | College freshman |
| Marcel Johnson | CI | Man | Black | Team 5 | 9 | Yes (siblings) | College junior |
| Jamal Ocasio | Grade 9 Supervisor | Man | Black | Grade 9 | 15 | No | Mathematics graduate student and instructor |
| Alyssa Brown | Grade 7 Supervisor | Woman | Black | Grade 7 | Unknown | Unknown | High school mathematics teacher |
| Bob Lowell | Co-founder; math instructor | Man | White | Whole program | 27 | No | Associate director of KMC (former mathematics professor and K-12 teacher) |

## The "Place" of KMC

A rigorous spatial or historical analysis is beyond the bounds of my study. However, other researchers have analyzed the politics of race, capital, and place in Detroit in ways that inform my understanding of KMC as a place.[7] Very generally, such scholarship has

[7] Sugrue (1996) detailed how histories of racist housing laws and regulations, industrial hiring practices and union politics, and other systemic operations of racism disproportionately funneled the negative consequences of deindustrialization toward Detroit's Black residents. There are also detailed histories of Detroit as a place where radical Black activists and other grassroots advocacy movements nurtured social and political communities (Kurashige, 2017; Thompson, 2017). In research about Detroit in more recent contexts, Newman et al. (2019)

demonstrated how *space* and *access* to space are sites of racialized and sociopolitical oppression, resistance, life-building, and meaning-making (Nickson, 2020; powell, 2015; Sugrue, 1996). As noted in Chapter 1, I draw upon Nickson's explanation that "place" refers to the constellation of histories, social interactions, and operations of power associated with a location that "impact our identities, perceptions, and decision-making" (p. 2)—including with regards to care in education. With this general understanding of how sociopolitical contexts and our personal relationships and positions within them are relevant to people's perceptions and meaning-making about place, we can better understand some salient information about KMC location.

As a program hosted by and on the campus of Wayne State University, KMC is located along the Cass Corridor, adjacent to the city's midtown and downtown districts and the Trumbull/Woodbridge neighborhood. Newman et al. (2019) explained how the Woodbridge neighborhood was previously known as the Trumbull neighborhood and was home to Black residents until urban redevelopment schemes pushed out and displaced them (p. 213). In between this neighborhood to the east and Detroit's midtown and downtown districts to the south, the Wayne State University campus is located in an area of Detroit that has seen steady investment and redevelopment in recent years. Campbell et al. (2019) explained that the funneling of public and private monies into districts like these, with disproportionately low concentrations of Black and Latinx peoples and disproportionately high concentrations of white people, is one way in

explored how gentrification, land contract and development terms, and unconstitutional tax foreclosures have contributed to the ongoing displacement of Detroiters. Campbell et al. (2019) also found that city "revitalization" plans have essentially prohibited the continuing provision of basic utilities to some neighborhoods—neighborhoods which have disproportionately greater percentages of Black residents than white residents. Nickson (2020) studied how navigating the complex matrices of racialized opportunity structures in the Detroit metropolitan area and their personal histories with the city of Detroit informs Black youth and families' school choices. Gloria House, a Black woman activist in Detroit, addressed the 2014 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Congress, hosted at Wayne State University. She said: "Detroit has a national reputation for its spunky organizers, innovators, ingenious leaders, and problem solvers. But these innovators have not been included in planning Detroit's future" (Newman et al, 2019, p. 206).

which Detroit's city planning efforts are effectively racist. People, including the youth in KMC, perceive and make meaning about trends that emerge in how policies unevenly distribute privilege and neglect.

The issues of public (dis)investment are not small ones in the daily contexts of KMC youth. They are part of the histories, social interactions, and operations of power associated with the location of the Wayne State Campus and with the residential neighborhoods that exist outside the city's corporate center. Jay and Conklin (2017) analyzed how policing strategies in Detroit—and especially "broken windows" policing strategies—have served to protect corporate interests in the city by targeting its Black residents. According to their analysis, Detroit Police Department has implemented policing strategies that have "been characterised by two spatially distinct features, consistent with the larger pattern of the city's uneven development: one strategy for the rapidly gentrifying downtown area, another for [Detroit's] deeply impoverished east and west sides" (p. 38). The effects of these spatially distinct strategies are (a) people in the east and west side neighborhoods have experienced a combination of strategic neglect (i.e. non-responsiveness to crime) and targeted militarized policing and (b) the larger downtown development area has received so-called "quality of life" policing to remove homeless people and preserve the aesthetic marketability of the area (p. 38-39).

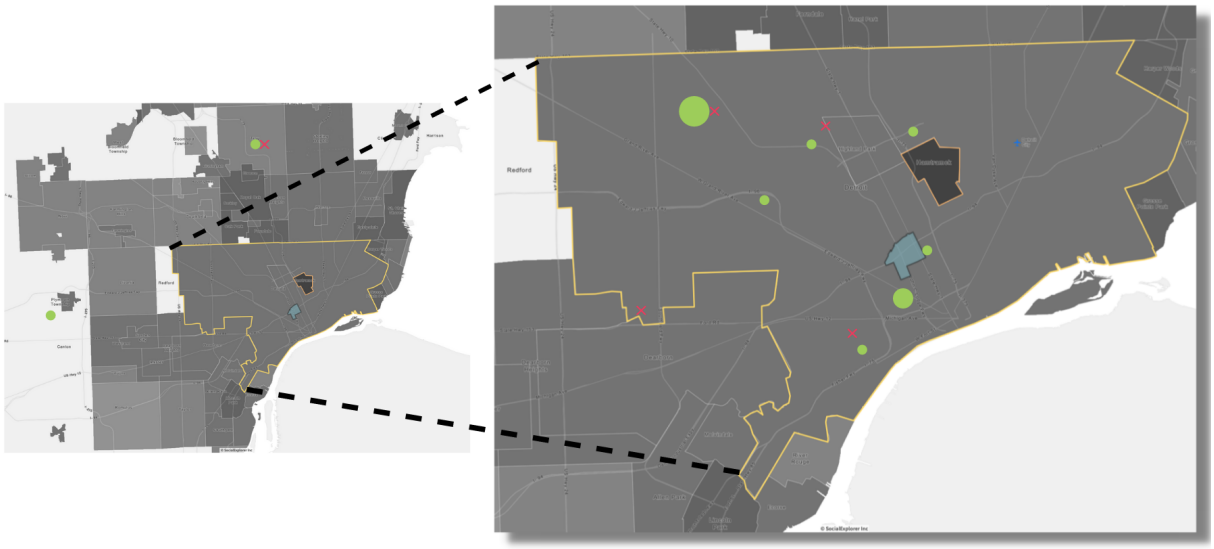
During the time of my research, I took note of some of the observable effects of systemic patterns of investment and disinvestment. Wayne State has lush, expansive lawns with landscaped greenery and old-growth trees. The buildings and businesses immediately surrounding it are generally well-maintained. I observed police officers patrolling the area surrounding the campus regularly, but they never approached me (i.e., my white body was part of what was being "protected"). In comparison to the streets outside the downtown zone, where

potholes and cracked sidewalks seemed to proliferate over the time of my research, the streets surrounding campus were freshly re-paved and repainted and the sidewalks smooth and even. The campus is in the middle of an area of Detroit that has received more than 10 billion dollars of investments in the last 15 years, while more than 150,000 people who owned homes in neighborhoods outside the city center have lost those homes to foreclosure in that same time period (Jay & Conklin, 2017, p. 41). The effects of this differential in investment (and the policing strategies that go with it) have manifested in details like repaved roads, maintained city landscaping, and the high density of street lights. In the map in Figure 3.2, below, I show a simple spatial distribution of where my study participants currently attend school (green circles) or formerly attended school (red x-marks) in comparison to the Wayne State campus (blue polygon). I compared this map to the map published by The Detroit Works Project Long Term Planning Steering Committee (Detroit Future City, 2013) that detailed which areas of the city were planned for disinvestment and for upgraded infrastructure, and then compared my interpretation to that of Campbell et al. (2019). Six of the 12 school-aged KMC youth I interviewed were enrolled at schools located in areas targeted for planned disinvestment. Four of the remaining six school-aged youth attended two schools that were both in areas zoned for upgraded infrastructure investments. The final two attended schools outside of the city, in the relatively affluent exurbs[8] of Plymouth and Troy.

**Figure 3.2**

*Youth participants' school locations in Detroit/Metro Detroit*

[8] Exurbs consist of communities outside the denser suburbs immediately surrounding an urban community. Davis et al. (1994) explained that, in a review of literature, one of the defining traits of exurban communities was a desire for "a rural lifestyle but with all the advantages of urban opportunities," including urban employment, social services, and cultural attractions (p. 46).



*Note.* Map shows the spatial distribution of study participants' K-12 school enrollments relative to the Wayne State University campus. The blue irregular polygon is the Wayne State University campus. The smallest green dots represent one person's attendance at a school at that location. The green dots are scaled to *2x* and *3x* to show the attendance of two and three people, respectively. Red x-marks represent one person's former attendance at a school at that location. The three participants who attend or attended school outside the Detroit Public Schools Community District did so in Plymouth and Troy, Michigan. The data shown here does not comprehensively represent participants' past and current school enrollments.

Throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I aim to center the voices of the youth who participated in my study. Understanding the physical locations—and the sociopolitical and personal meanings and perceptions youth navigate in those places—is important context that can allow us to understand what they share about their sense of safety with added dimension and attunement.

## Data Analysis Techniques and Plans

In total, I have over 110 hours of participant-observation data (including field notes and reflective memos), 18 interviews with 17 different participants, and over 45 artifacts (including organization documents, photos of program art and decor, and blank student assignments). After concluding my fieldwork with KMC in August 2018, I returned for about four weeks, between

July and August, 2019. I identified the need for further data because, after engaging in some preliminary analysis, I realized that I needed to pay more explicit attention in my interviews and field notes to the operations of both whiteness, broadly, and instructional arrangements in classrooms. For example, in Maya's narrative at the start of this chapter, she brought together conceptions of research (by me, a white researcher), her support of the KMC director's (a white man's) efforts to build the program, a critique of how her educational rights have violated, an affirmation of her value for education, and a reference to Emmett Till and the Civil Rights Movement. After sitting with her words and reflecting on issues of race and positioning in this exchange, I had many questions: *How should I make sense of Maya's reference to Emmett Till as a catalyst? What is she saying about white violence and Black trauma and how they are related to theories of change? Is her mention of her appreciation for Dr. Cohen reflective of any deeper assumptions or impressions about white paternalism as a mechanism for opportunity? What would the implications of this view be for her definition of racial justice?* These questions are all deeply related to my methodological commitments regarding identity and collective meaning-making. They also relate to the bodies of scholarship I have drawn upon to frame my research, like the need to better understand classroom interactions and their relationships to justice. Moreover, in order to diligently investigate how white educators can responsibly learn and practice critical care, I realized that I needed more data from classrooms in the program so I could better triangulate children's interview data with participant-observation data about classroom dynamics.

I employed an iterative process of descriptive, analytical, and thematic analysis through rounds of coding and memoing (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). To begin my analysis, I first descriptively coded field notes and interview transcriptions using a combination of a list of codes

I devised based on my research questions, observation memos and an open coding process. For example, I coded for students' personal definitions/naming of care and for programmatic definitions/naming of care in order to understand how participants may be differentiating (or not) between individual understandings of care and care at the programmatic level. I also coded for instances or invocations of known systemic racial injustices in educational contexts (e.g., hyper-surveillance of Black youths' bodies), but also performed inductive coding so that I captured dimensions of youths' mathematical experiences that I had not anticipated in my review of the literature. With my participant-observation data of classrooms, I triangulated between my coding of the 16 hours of data I collected in mathematics classes taught by Mr. James, Dr. Jordan, Mr. Lowell, and Ms. Bianchi and the remainder of my participant-observation data in order to capture some elements of instruction that were consistent across the program and some that varied more between teachers.

Then, I compared descriptive codes between documents and wrote analytical memos to help me identify patterns in the data. Based on these patterns, I generated a list of analytical and thematic codes. I then analytically coded a representative selection of interview transcripts and field notes to confirm, disconfirm, and revise preliminary analytical codes. At this point, I wrote a summary theoretical memo to synthesize and extend the ideas developed in my rounds of analytical coding. I then engaged in two rounds of theoretical coding. I completed the second round after making some revisions to my conceptual framework in order to ensure that my theoretical coding aligned with the framework that I described in Chapter 2. As noted by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), these iterative processes of coding and memoing are not discrete from the work of interpreting data (p. 315). Rather, these steps structure interpretation such that it supports ethical and deliberate movement through data management, data exploration,

specification and reduction of data, interpretation, and, ultimately, representation of the research narrative (p. 317). So, for example, my conceptual framework always included Ball's (2018) theory of discretionary spaces. However, I later revised my conceptual framework and my coding to reflect a more bounded analysis of instruction given limitations in my data. See Table 3.5 for examples of descriptive, thematic/analytical, and theoretical codes from my collected data.

**Table 3.5**

*Examples of code types with data samples*

| Type of Code | Code | Example quotation |
|---|---|---|
| **Descriptive** | **Detroit ed** *Educational context of Detroit (names city + education)* | "I've taught out in Lansing, through my student teaching stuff and it's, I can see the clear difference that they actually want their kids to learn, not just memorize and be good for tests and stuff, um, and I feel like Detroit is missing that piece, that's where the gap is growing wider and wider from." |
| **Thematic/ Analytical** | **Prog family - resources** *Linking of program "family" and program resources* | "So basically, we had visitors come and they just asked us a little Q & A. And then one of the questions that hit me solely was "Why do you keep coming back?" or "Why do you plan to come back?" And I said I plan to come back because this, like I said, can skyrocket your career and also it's like a family, and you don't want to leave your family—up and leave—so it's like a family things, like, I feel like once you're in it, you're in it. There's no going back out." |
| **Theoretical** | **Youth caring agency** *Demonstration of youth's sense of agentic care (realized or abstract)* | "And it's like KMC has given me so much for my self-esteem, who I am. It didn't change who I am, but it made me realize how worthy I am to be who I am. And I just want to give that back to somebody. Oh my god. Everybody talks about that. Like, you want to do the same thing but someone else for someone else to feel this way how you feel? Because it's such an amazing feeling. You want to like, spread it along like: Love is not supposed to be alone. Love is supposed to be for everything. Love is supposed to be spread. Once you feel like you want to give it to someone else." |

I used a qualitative data analysis software, *ATLAS.ti*, to assist in both data management and analysis. Finally, given my methodological responsibilities to the communities of scholars whose knowledge I have drawn upon and to the people in my study, I sought feedback and

engaged others—scholars and participants—in meaning-making to ensure that my work and findings maintained validity. This was particularly important as I attempted to engage theories and practices of care into which I was not raised or socialized.

In order to answer my first research question, in my data analysis, I sought to describe and analyze participants' explicit verbal explanations of care *and* their more implicit conceptualizations of care, including their descriptions of how they enacted and experienced care in the KMC community. I also demarcated when participants explicitly named race in their discussions of care, when they used (potentially) racially-coded language or otherwise made more implicit references to race, and when they did not name race at all. I started by analyzing interview data and then, using descriptive codes, went on to analyze my participant-observation data. To answer the second research question, I analyzed instructional patterns in mathematics classrooms that involved general summaries of lesson structure and pedagogies, content, tasks and activities, and overall distributions of student and teacher talk and interaction with one another. First, I coded across interview and participant-observation data to inform and structure iterative rounds of analysis and interpretation. I coded and analyzed students' interview data about their experiences in mathematics classrooms, paying particular attention to how they situated specific examples or experiences in relation to broader themes of their sharing. I also coded and analyzed my participant-observation data from mathematics classrooms with attention to instructional interactions. Due to limitations in my data, I did not code at the level of micro-interaction. However, I did take field notes during 16 hours of classroom observation with more specific attention to general patterns of classroom interaction as well as detailed documentation of a number of instructional exchanges in each class that occurred across multiple days of observation. After revising my second research question based on limitations in my data, I

recoded these 16 hours of classroom observation data with attention to five domains of instruction (Malloy, 2009) and analytical codes based on my analysis about the program's dominant discourses of care. Lastly, I answered my third research question through a process of coding and interpreting participants' interview data and my participant-observation data for evidence of youths' explicit or implied discussions or substantive references to social, political, and economic issues, to the city of Detroit, or to other aspects of identity and systems of power that I had described in my conceptual framework. Given my forefronting of race in my research, I continued to pay primary attention to race in my coding and analysis, but worked to identify intersectional operations of racism and other systemic oppressions. In the tradition of qualitative case study research, I have sought to triangulate data in my analyses. The comparative and holistic nature of case study research means that valid data analysis must attempt to find themes and theories across data sources rather than within a single source or category. Please see Table 3.6, below, for key linkages between my research questions and data sources.

**Table 3.6**

*Key linkages between my research questions and data sources*

| **Research Question 1:** How do KMC participants conceive of care and how do the dominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to issues of education and race? | |
|---|---|
| **Intended Purposes of RQ** | **Informing Data Sources** |
| ● Surface consistencies and variations in program participants' understandings of and actions related to care<br>● Identify how program leadership and design related to understandings and enactments of care to determine what understandings and enactments were normative and adopted programmatically<br>● To identify whether and/or to what extent participants explicitly named relationships between care and race, including between various groupings of people with varied racial identities | ● Participant interviews<br>● Participant-observation field notes<br>  ● Team times<br>  ● TA/PA debriefings<br>  ● Senior staff meetings<br>  ● All-program events<br>  ● Mathematics classes (across) |

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Question 2: How do KMC participants' conceptions of care relate to normative instructional practices and dynamics in the program, particularly those related to mathematics?</td></tr>
<tr><td>● Identify typical instructional patterns in terms of pedagogy, dialogue, content (broadly and in tasks and assessments), and opportunities for student interactions (with teacher and with each other)<br>● Identify explicit invocations of care in mathematics classrooms and interviews<br>● Identify thematic alignment or divergence between caring discourses and instructional patterns</td><td>● Participant-observation field notes from mathematics classes (16 hours)<br>● Mr. Jordan's 7th-grade "Real Numbers" classes (4 hours)<br>● Mr. Lowell's 7th-grade "Calculus" and 8th-grade "The Operations of the Real Numbers" classes (4 hours)<br>● Ms. Bianchi's 9th-grade "Foundations of Algebra" classes (4 hours)<br>● Dr. Brown's TA "SAT Prep" and "Proof" classes (4 hours)<br>● Participant-observation field notes (additional classes)<br>● 7th-grade math (6 hours)<br>● 8th-grade math (10)<br>● 9th-grade math (4 hours)<br>● TA/PA math (6 hours)<br>● Youth interviews<br>● Debriefing meetings (rare)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Question 3: How do youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences?</td></tr>
<tr><td>● Identify range and detail of youths' interpretations of care relative to social and political contexts/issues<br>● To understand what may be informing youths' interpretations of KMC and school experiences<br>● To understand how youths' meaning make about the program discourses of care relates to their broader understandings of care in education, unbounded by the program</td><td>● Youth and college student interviews<br>● Participant-observation field notes (coded for youths' mentions of education, school, and/or Detroit)<br>● TA/PA math classes<br>● Debriefings<br>● All program events</td></tr>
</table>

## Ethics, Validity, and Researcher Reflexivity

Historically, qualitative research has used considerations of internal and external validity adapted from quantitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Internal validity refers to the defensibility of claims of cause and effect in research findings, and external validity refers to the defensibility of the generalizability of findings. Critical qualitative researchers have sought conceptions of validity that are more aligned with the epistemologies underlying qualitative research, including Weis and Fine's (2012) critical bifocality and Madison's (2006) dialogic

performative. I briefly explain and synthesize these concepts to demonstrate how I plan to work with and toward validity in my proposed study.

I use Weis and Fine's critical bifocality as a way to work for validity in my analysis across spheres of interaction (from micro- to macro). Critical bifocality is

> a theory of method in which researchers try to make visible the sinewy linkages or circuits through which structural conditions are enacted in policy and institutions as well as the ways in which such conditions come to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals. (Weis and Fine, p. 173)

Critical bifocality calls for the tracing of phenomenon across spheres of experience, from micro- to macro-level. Thus, my use of a conceptual framework incorporating sociopolitical analyses of race in general program contexts and instructional dynamics aligns with critical bifocality. Working across this telescoping analytical lens while paying rigorous attention to my own subjectivities and the ethical grounding of my involvement with this project led me to Madison's (2006) notion of the dialogic performative. Madison offered the concept as one way to honor self-exploration and self-reckoning in our work without centering the self at the expense of others. Madison wrote:

> What I have come to realize during my fieldwork...is that by being in the presence of Others, the fully embodied struggle to pay attention is a methodological and ethical necessity, *and a service for freedoms that implicate us all*. I am convinced that when you do body-to-body fieldwork, over time, you will shed parts of yourself—others press upon your bone and skin and heart, and it is not just you anymore (it never was). (p. 323, emphasis mine)

I understand this idea of the dialogic performative as a way to vigilantly consider and focus on meaning-making through relationships—whether explicitly engaged in, like in interviews, or more implicitly called upon, like in observations with little participation. Drawing on this methodological perspective has facilitated my reckoning with some ways my white, middle class and female subjectivities have informed my racialized, classed, and gendered assumptions and presumptions about care. My understanding of what youth described as care developed in dialogue with my enculturated notions. A specific example of this is my analysis of youths' descriptions of providing food and money for each other as acts of care related to their educational experiences. During data collection, I realized there was dissonance between my intuitive understanding of providing food and money as acts of care and the value that youth were assigning it. I reflected that, while I have experienced a few brief periods of food insecurity in my adult life, I had never experienced sustained or frequent food insecurity or food insecurity in the context of being a learner in school or in an out-of-school educational context. In contrast, I knew anecdotally that many of the youth with whom I spoke were living with poverty and that a couple regularly did not have lunch or money to buy lunch. So, the "dialogic performative" in this instance required me to acknowledge the limitations of my own subjective experiences valuing food as an expression of care, to take youths' sharing about food as an expression of care seriously, and attend to how *they* assigned meaning to that expression of care rather than make racialized and problematically deficit-oriented assumptions (e.g., that youth without food or money for lunch were living with poverty).

In order to engage in practical validity work throughout the duration of my study, I continued to maintain relationships with KMC administrators and alum. While I am not able to maintain contact with all of the participants from the time of my study, I have had the

opportunity of continuing to work with KMC leadership and one of the KMC alum and instructors in developing plans for future research. This ongoing contact has continued to surface the dissonance between how I understand race and racism and how many of the leaders in KMC understand race and racism. Thematically, these ongoing relationships have allowed me to consider program leaders' perspectives and to maintain validity in describing the gaps between theirs and my own.

## Contribution and Significance

My study has been designed to illuminate human experiences of the interactions between care, race, and instruction—all within the context of a summer mathematics education program. My aim was not merely to describe these experiences. As Dillard (2000) explained, "To know something is to have a living relationship with it, influencing and being influenced by it, responding to and being responsible for it" (p. 673). While qualitative research like my study does not claim to be generalizable across contexts, I believe my findings will contribute to theorizing how matters of care and justice can operate in instructional contexts and between youth in instructional contexts. Ball and Forzani (2009) argued that teacher education must center practice, because "despite the familiarity of teaching, many key aspects of this deliberate practice are unnatural" (p. 499). My work expands our conceptions of what kinds of interactions comprise the work of teaching. My research also contributes to scholarly and practical efforts to attend to the ongoing and tension-full work of examining how teachers' enactments of care can reproduce and/or disrupt systemic patterns of oppression. In particular, I hope that my research can contribute to building capacities for educators—and particularly white educators—to examine our normalized, dominant modes of care and transform our knowledge and practices into critical care praxis.

# Chapter IV

## Discourses & Dialectics of Care and Domination

As a community-based program that publicly asserted *love* as its most integral value, I chose to study normative conceptions and operations of care in KMC. Furthermore, as a program founded by white men but populated by Detroit youth of color, KMC operated as a site where people's conceptualizations and practices of care necessarily involved racial subjectivities and sociopolitical tensions. In Chapter 2, I shared how intellectual and practical traditions of critical care in education have centered communities' caring agencies and issues of justice (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; DeNicolo et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999; Wilson, 2014, 2015). In contrast, the white feminist theories of care that are predominant in educational research have advanced individualized and decontextualized ideas of care as an ethical panacea to oppression (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984).

In this chapter, I report findings primarily related to my first and third research questions: *How do KMC participants conceive of care and how do the dominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to issues of education and race?* and *How do youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences?* The data from my study show that these two questions focus attention on interactive and entangled phenomena. In the following sections, I describe the day-to-day operations of the program in order to establish a picture of what activities and general structures make up KMC's summer camp. Then, I share data that demonstrate how KMC advanced particular discourses of

care as an individual, race-evasive practice for attending to the perceived needs of other people. Furthermore, I share data demonstrating how programmatic discourses of care asserted normative relational expectations that framed conflict, non-compliance, and non-participation as contrary to caring dispositions. I also share findings about how youth members of KMC made meaning of care in the context of their broader educational experiences as youth of color in Detroit, and how they negotiated such meanings in terms of their participation in KMC and its normative discourses of care. In particular, I show how youth understood KMC as a resource and model of social change, and related these understandings to their adoption or attenuation of programmatic race-evasiveness, deficit-based paradigms, and community-building.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Ball and Forzani (2007) explained that while the instructional dynamic is "usually associated with schools," it can also serve as a "metaphor for interactions that take place in many other settings"—and that using it as a metaphor brings an educational perspective to places and spaces outside of schools (p. 6). As I discuss in Chapter 5, KMC's mathematical contexts are important instructional contexts. However, they are only one version of the instructional dynamic in KMC. We can understand how, in the program as a whole, adults and youth may interact with each other and with the content of the program's structures and discourses. Furthermore, we can explore both instructional and non-instructional interactions—i.e., interactions that involve deliberate and structured instruction of particular content and interactions that do not. In both cases, we can pay attention to how the program's norms (particularly as maintained by leadership) may mediate these interactions.

I began my study of KMC's structures and discourses by examining a combination of settings: some that, in schools, would be non-instructional but that are more ambiguous in the context of a CBE and some, like mathematics classrooms, that are straightforwardly

instructional. Having some sense of how KMC operates on a day-to-day basis provides important context for my study of care in the program, including how it relates to the broader instructional dynamic of KMC and to issues of race and power. I share this contextual information below and pay particular attention to the structures and discourses that I observed to be normative in the KMC summer camp to help situate my findings and participants' words and interactions.

**Communicating Belonging: Structures and Discourses in Program Routines**

In Chapter 1, I explained the basic structure of KMC: there are 120 seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-graders in KMC (40 students in each grade level). There are 12 teams total: four seventh-grade teams, four eighth-grade teams, and four ninth-grade teams. Within each grade level, the four teams operated in pairs: Team One and Team Two shared a schedule, Team Three and Team Four shared a schedule, and so on. The program's days all followed the same schedule, except for Thursdays, which were "family" days (as I describe more below). On all days, the camp day began with optional breakfast and then transitioned into Team Time, when team members gathered and spent time doing activities determined by their CIs (team-building activities, homework review, students' choice, etc.). After morning Team Time, everyone in the program attended the daily assembly. There, each team would sit together in designated areas of the auditorium. While program staff shared with me that they generally aimed to have the assembly last less than 30 minutes, the operating rule was that the assembly would take as much time as needed. Because each assembly included several elements that were designed and led by students, without adult pre-approval or oversight, the program staff decided that it was more important to honor the students' participation than it was to strictly monitor time and risk curtailing a student's moment of leadership or sharing. I noted that if program administrators had

particular opinions or ideas about how students were participating in assemblies, they would discuss it in the senior staff meetings with all of the team CIs.

I observed one particularly illustrative example of KMC's intergenerational leadership model in a senior staff meeting, when Cohen shared that he had been wondering if youth were getting too rowdy during one particular routine at Thursday assemblies. He suggested the possibility that CIs and other senior staff members present could "moderate" the activity. Maya, a first year CI, started to respond by saying, "I know I'm new, so my opinion is kinda…" before trailing into silence. Ms. Thompson, the program dean, said in a very firm tone, "No, that is not true at all. Your opinion absolutely matters." Maya then shared that she disagreed with Cohen and explained:

> We (the CIs) get up, we do silly dances, we joke around, we grab the kids, 'Come on, sing it baby! You got it!' You know, it's a moment for us. And even more importantly, it's a moment for our kids to just get wacky and nobody look at them like they're bad kids, crazy kids, you know?

I observed Cohen acknowledge Maya's point by emphasizing that he agreed he wanted the kids to express themselves. He also said that he still thought the activity could be moderated some, but that it wasn't his decision to make and he respected if others did not want to introduce more structure to the activity. While I observed a handful of instances where Cohen or Lowell more clearly exerted their authority as program co-founders, those instances were relatively rare compared to the type of open discussion between Maya and Cohen.

Moreover, though, the example of their discussion shows how the College Instructors participated in program-level leadership in substantive ways that intentionally shaped the interactional dynamics of the camp. Cohen expressed to me the value he held for having a

leadership structure that included high school youth and college students as program leaders. He said, repeatedly, that the youth staff were "the heart and soul of KMC." In many ways, the distributed leadership model engaged youth as agentic carers. For instance, Maya's advocacy that the staff not intervene on the kids' participation—including their noise level and physical movement—was a demonstration of her care. Maya did not name the mattering of race—either hers, the kids, or Cohen's—when we talked about the exchange. Still, her advocacy countered a pattern of white educators' constraining and surveilling Black youths' bodies (Annamma, 2017).

Ginwright (2010) wrote about the potential power for community-based education programs to practice non-institutional leadership models, including involving youth in leadership positions. He explained that youth and adults having open discussions where they authentically negotiated issues together was a meaningful way to decenter adults' power. The distributed leadership model of KMC did not go so far as to decenter adults' power. Indeed, there were countless interactions in which professional staff exerted adult authority. For instance, I observed Cohen chastise the CIs one day when he found Ms. Thompson cleaning up from their catered dinner ("Not our dean, guys! Not our dean cleaning up!"). However, I also observed dozens of interactions like the exchange between Maya and Cohen, where a CI countered a point made by another senior staff member or added a perspective based on their understanding of the youth involved.

Regarding this particular instance with Maya, she later shared with me that she felt a personal connection to the activity at issue based on her own time in the program as a kid. She said: "So for me, I only was sensitive about it because I remember that moment for me. That was the only moment I got to release and let go. And as silly as it may sound, that moment is a lot of release for these kids." The intergenerational leadership model of KMC did serve to engage

youth and young adults as carers (Maya was 18 at the time of this incident). Still, a key element of critical care praxis is engaging youth as agents of critical care (i.e., developing sociopolitical consciousness and a commitment to justice). Individual care can still be incredibly meaningful—and, as Sosa-Provencio (2019) explained, engaging youth in the *critical* nature of care can "fortify youth of color to rise up ...to transform inequities" (p. 1120). It is absolutely possible that Maya and others in similar situations had a more developed sociopolitical and racial analysis informing their leadership. However, as a program, data I collected indicate that KMC actively did not facilitate or engage youth leaders' critical consciousness. While opening up opportunities for youth to engage in caring practice at the program leadership level, KMC's intergenerational leadership model did not amount to critical care praxis.

The program structured student interactions in other ways. In line with the program's general emphasis on older kids caring for younger kids, the program incorporated structures for youth participation and leadership into its daily routines, and used those routines to message the idea of "family." In each morning's assembly, the seventh-graders sat closest to the front of the auditorium, followed by the eighth-graders, and then the ninth-graders. Every morning—except for Thursdays—Cohen would facilitate a roll call. Standing at the front of the auditorium, he would signal the shift to roll call by saying a variation of "Now, as we do every day, we start with the youngest among us." Switching to a booming sports-announcer voice, he would then call upon each team to announce their presence ("Teeeeam ONE!"). After being called, each team would perform their self-selected roll call response. In the first two weeks of my participant-observation, this often involved CIs and TAs sharing a joke, performing a song or dance, or leading the entire team in a response in unison (verbal or non-verbal). These were some ways that TAs participated in visible leadership roles, too. Later, in my observations of pre-

assembly Team Times, I noted that CIs regularly put their team's TAs in charge of deciding on roll call participation. In some cases, for example, the youth decided that the team would respond with coordinated silence (i.e., not respond). Twice I observed TAs arrange for their team to sing happy birthday to a kid on their team. Furthermore, as the program continued, I noticed that roll call more frequently involved one or two kids from each team showcasing their talent(s). Singing a song, reading a poem, expressing appreciation for other youth, and telling a joke were all common ways that they would execute roll call on behalf of their team. Some CBE scholarship has documented how, in out-of-school spaces, structures allowing youth to participate in group activities in modes of their own choosing can be personally impactful—particularly for youth of color and other youth who have been marginalized from participating authentically in school (Ginwright, 2010; Watson, 2012). Still, Kwon (2013) pointed out that one of the risks in CBE spaces that emphasize "feel-good" activities is that affective affirmation and enjoyment are not enough to be truly humanizing. Naming this tension allows us to understand how many of KMC's structures for youth participation could be individually meaningful while remaining disconnected from a larger liberatory project, as I detail in later sections.

After spending time together as a whole program at the morning assembly, each pair of teams would have two consecutive blocked activities/classes: one block of Team Time and one block of foundational mathematics (The Real Numbers, The Operations of the Real Numbers, and Foundations of Algebra for seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-graders, respectively). I discuss more about these classes in Chapter 5, but in general, the mathematics classes usually followed a teacher-directed pedagogy with some measure of choral response or recitation (Malloy, 2009). In my field notes, I documented that youth approached the board to demonstrate their work to the class almost three times per class period, on average. A representative example of common

instruction in these classes comes from my observation of a seventh-grade "Real Numbers" class. I noted that the instructor stood at the board, wrote "$4\frac{1}{5}$," and facilitated the following exchange:

Instructor: Alright, converting mixed numbers into fractions. If I had four and one-fifth? (Calling on student with raised hand) Go ahead.

Student: Can I come do it?

Instructor: Yeah!

Student: (Comes to front and sketches on board then turns to class). So five times four plus one. You have (motioning at his sketched number bars and counting) one, two, three, four, and then one piece of the last bar.

Instructor: Yep! Very good. We gonna have four bars of five-fifths, which is equal to 20 fifths. When we add that one-fifth that's left over, we will have 21 fifths. So, to do this you multiply the whole number by the denominator and then you can add the numerator. You would have 21 fifths.

TAs attended these foundational mathematics courses with the students in their team. Then, except for Thursdays, the kids from each pairs of teams would have, in variable order, their "discovery" math classes, lunch, and one of rotating menu of elective activity classes (Chess and Games, Probability, Statistics, Weird Science, Art, Global Positioning System, Magic, Student Presentations, Problem Solving, Chemistry Computer Lab, or Health Sciences). While the topics of these classes varied, an excerpt from my field notes during a 7th-grade art class provide a representative depiction of the generally more relaxed tone and structure of these courses:

*I participated with 7th-grade students as they made their own "stained-glass windows" by creating a geometric design on a square piece of clear plastic and painting it. The*

*instructor showed them examples of different ways they could plan their designs—from the center working out, if they wanted it to be symmetrical across both axes, or in a tessellated pattern if they wanted to create something like an optical illusion. After the kids had some time to design their patterns, the instructor invited them to share their designs with others if they wanted to, and then the kids talked and painted while the instructor walked around and fielded questions and joined the students in informal conversation. I also walked around and chatted with students. Some kids eagerly showed me their designs and progress, some kids focused intently on their designs and worked relatively independently, and some others seemed to only partially attend to the art project.*

Of note, the elective classes were typically teacher-directed, just as the mathematics classes, but I did note that they often left much more time for students to interact with each other. However, the teachers usually did not provide students with a content-related task that would mediate their interaction. I noted that a majority of students' interactional opportunities in these classes were thus only incidentally about the class content (e.g. if the students themselves chose to talk about it).

During discovery math classes and elective activity classes, TAs would take their own mathematics courses (Algebra 1, Algebra II, Logic, Foundations of Advanced Mathematics, Intro to Calculus, or Proof), but they had the same lunch period as the kids they were paired with. After the official program ended, the student-run dance team would hold practice in one room and there would be rooms designated for tutoring support, homework, and playing games. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, the grade-level supervisors would meet with their grade-level teams' Program Assistants and Teaching Assistants for the "TA/PA Debriefing," during

which time the TAs and PAs shared highlights from their day and/or challenges they were facing supporting their assigned students. Then, the grade-level supervisors would facilitate collective brainstorming about how to address the dilemma to give the students some strategies. During the debriefings, the program dean, Cohen, and any math instructors would drop into the meetings and offer commentary (e.g. positive feedback about an interaction they saw that they thought was meaningful or encouragement if a group had a rough day). For example, in one TA meeting the eighth-grade supervisor and discovery instructor said, "I want to shout out Darron, 'cause last year he was a silent leader, but this year he has become more of a vocal leader." The instructor described an incident he observed, in which some younger kids were talking to each other while another, very shy kid was trying to share an idea with the class. According to the instructor, Darron talked with the kids who were talking and told them that he knew they did not mean any harm, but that he was worried their talking made the other kid feel more nervous about sharing. Again, while not critical care praxis, these moments represented how program staff worked to affirm and encourage particular forms of youths' caring actions and leadership.

During these meetings, if a PA or TA started to share something that, for whatever reason, an adult thought may be more appropriate to discuss one-on-one, the adult would say something like, "Could we touch base after the debriefing or in the hall really quickly? I want to hear what you have to share, but let's do it one-on-one first." Each day, after the TA/PA debriefings, the senior staff (including the CIs) would meet and follow a similar process. It was also in these meetings that the senior staff would review any behavioral or safety issues that had come up that day. Like the morning assemblies, the guideline for the duration of these meetings was that they would take however much time they would take. The time and human energies

devoted to having these debriefing meetings every day are indicative of one of the affordances of CBE programs: flexibility to align resources with desired program culture and relational aims.

On Thursdays, the assembly, lunch time, and debriefing times were different. They were all referred to as "family" events: family roll call, family meal, and family debriefing. Youth and adults used this language around family with the same consistency, and the overall programmatic adoption of these family terms often underscored how KMC structured its activities to communicate affiliation and belonging with the program. On Thursdays, class time was also abbreviated, with each student having only their foundational math class and an elective class. At Thursday assemblies, the ninth-grade supervisor Jamal Ocasio—himself a KMC alum—would lead the entire auditorium in family roll call. During family roll call, Jamal would don a sweatband around his forehead, stand up, and yell:

Are you ready in the front? [Students in the front whoop and holler]

Are you ready in the back? [Students in the back whoop and holler]

If you're ready in the front and you're ready in the back

Let's not waste any time, lemme HEAR THAT CLAP [Students start clapping on beat]

Then, everyone would join in, clapping and singing/chanting:

KMC, KMC, it's the roll call, it's the roll call!

I said, KMC, KMC, it's the roll call, it's the roll call!

Then, repeating the following chant for each grade level, they would do the following call and response—starting, as always, with the seventh-graders:

I said SE-VENS! It's the roll call, it's the roll call!

I said SE-VENS! It's the roll call, it's the roll call!

TEAM ONE, has the roll been called?

(Team One only): YES, the roll's been called!

TEAM TWO, has the roll been called?

(Team Two only): YES, the roll's been called!

After each grade level's roll call was complete, they would repeat the chorus with "KMC" before going on to the next grade level. During the family roll call, CIs and TAs would run around and encourage kids to join them by getting out of their seats, dancing, singing, jumping—anything (safe) that they felt like doing. Every Thursday, Cohen would stand to the side of the auditorium and do his signature dance move;[9] kids commonly stood next to him and imitated his dancing. After class, all program participants would attend family meal, where the program provided lunch for everyone (outside, as long as weather permitted). Instructors would organize informal games during the lunch time and students also could initiate games or self-select into activities (including just sitting and talking or enjoying some quiet time). Lastly, on Thursdays, the PAs and TAs from all teams would meet together for family debriefing." Family debriefings focused on TAs and PAs sharing anything they wanted to celebrate from that week. The common use of language about KMC as a "family" in concert with the energetic and participatory nature of "family" activities communicated the idea of belonging. It also communicated KMC's positioning of itself as an educational context distinct from typical schools.

As a whole, the program's daily activities and structures were part of its discursive signifying of care as something unique to the program. To that point, Maya explained to me that the rituals of the program were part of what connected the youth and adults in the program:

[9] Cohen's dance move was called The Bernie, and was meant to imitate the "dancing" of the deceased boss in the 1989 film *Weekend at Bernie's.*

> Without [the rituals], KMC wouldn't feel how it does. It's almost like when you set a standard and you try to stick to it no matter what. It's the same thing. So it's kinda like we expect assembly to be crazy... And so if we didn't have the things that we do, we definitely wouldn't get to see those moments where upper staff opens up, if assembly wasn't run the way that it was. So the small ritual of PC turning around and smooching himself at the board, that ritual? He's been doing that since I was kid. Since the beginning of time. If he didn't do that, he wouldn't be PC. I wouldn't be as comfortable as I am with him. If, when we did family roll call, if PC didn't always do the Bernie in the corner, if he didn't always look crazy when he dancing over there, it wouldn't feel the same. You know? If Ms. Thompson—that ritual (another morning ritual) was actually passed down from Mr. Gordon to her. Mr. Gordon used to say "Have a beautiful day by creating a beautiful day…." You know, those rituals are very important because without them, these kids, it's not really any other moment in the day for all the upper staff to open up or for all the upper staff to make the kids smile and laugh. Without those rituals, upper staff wouldn't get a chance to see who the kids really are. So that's why those rituals are so important.

Complementing Maya's detailed explanation of why the rituals mattered, all but one of the youth I interviewed named at least one of the Thursday family rituals or morning assembly rituals as evidence of adults' care for them in the program. Ginwright (2010) explained that when CBEs facilitate time and activities between youth and adults where both are invited to be themselves, it can bridge "the generation gap" (p. 86). These rituals are also important examples of how mathematics was not the only "content" of KMC. CBE literature reminds us that KMC is

positioned dialectically to schools, including in youths' interpretations and meaning-making about program activities and discourses (Baldridge et al., 2017).

### Individual Responsibility & the Specialness of KMC

I found that people in KMC largely identified conceptions of care in the program as related to elements of the program outside of the mathematics classrooms—elements that are relevant to the broader interactional dynamics between youth, adults, and program discourses. In this section, I share details and data about normative conceptions of care in KMC and how the program framed care operating within the program versus outside of the program. I also share details and data about some of the variations in how youth negotiated dissonances between the program's conception of care and their own positioned experiences of systemic neglect and racism as youth of color in Detroit. Specifically, data show that nearly all of the youth adopted the program's discourses of care as an individual act and invested in the idea that care should respond to individuals' needs.

In the previous section, I described data showing how KMC messaged a program culture to students, including heavily emphasizing the rhetoric of KMC as a "family" with unique traditions and relationships. I also found that the supermajority of youth and adults I interviewed expressed an understanding of the KMC environment as a "safe" place—both in terms of emotional safety and physical safety. Interview data also showed that all of the youth connected the idea of "care" in KMC to a way that the program provided material resources (including the specifics of the environment, i.e. location in the city or quality of facilities). My participant-observation data, in particular, revealed consistent program-level messaging that asserted a conception of care as an individual responsibility and discursively positioned care as a special feature of the program (i.e. a common individual commitment inside the bounds of the program).

Together, these discourses of care created an operating notion of KMC being uniquely caring and uniquely safe relative to the world "outside" of KMC by virtue of the program's cultivation of individual morality. Youth made-meaning about the program's association of care and safety in relation to their broader experiences in schools and as youth in Detroit as I highlight below, although less than half of them explicitly mentioned race or other factors relevant to their sociopolitical context.

**Vignette: A Programmatic Fixation on Safety and Harm as Individual Behaviors**

The first day of my participant-observation, on the first day of KMC camp in 2018, I watched Dr. Cohen stand onstage at the front of a sloped auditorium. "How many of you have been impacted by violence?" he asked. I watched as at least three-quarters of the 200 youth and young adults of color in the room raised their hands. I noted that Cohen had also raised his hand—whether as a model or a genuine response, I wasn't sure. After letting the hands float in the air for a few prolonged moments, he addressed the kids:

> The KMC is about making the world a better place for our kids—and this means we know the world isn't at its best yet. It isn't all good, and some of it is very painful. Some of us aren't treated right, whether that be because of race, religion, or something else.

I noted my own wondering about Cohen beginning the first day of KMC with a discussion of violence. I also noted a tension in Cohen's message: he said that the program was about making the world a better place and he said that race and religion are connected to mistreatment. In my observation, Cohen was earnest and well-intended. He also implicitly asserted a theory of social relations and change that framed the relation between the two as an individual phenomenon.

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Exactly five weeks to the day later, I sat in on the afternoon senior staff meeting. I was used to the general flow of agenda items by this time in my participant-observation: a checking in, a sharing of highlights from the day, an overview of administrative communications, and then group reflection about how to respond to any concerns or issues coming up with youth in the program. Today's meeting started a little differently, though. The white woman program dean, Ms. Thompson, along with two of the Black College Instructors in the room, began the meeting by recounting an interaction that occurred between some Black high school-aged KMC youth and Detroit police. The room, I noted, was absolutely silent. Dr. Cohen's mouth hung slightly open, his eyes and mouth frozen in a look of concern. I noted that several of the CIs—all but one a Black young adult from Detroit—held their faces impassively, but kept their eyes focused steadily on Ms. Thompson and the two CIs filling in details in her story.

The events, as Ms. Thompson relayed them, were as follows: Four—or maybe five—Black TAs were hanging out together after the program's activities had ended for the day. They were walking down a stairwell in the building that housed KMC classes, when a police officer[10] confronted them. The youth later reported to Ms. Thompson that the officer had been aggressive and threatening, first saying he had received a noise complaint and asking them to explain their presence in the building and growing more intense from there. One of the children called Ms. Thompson, who reported to the group that she arrived at the stairwell within a couple of minutes. There, she apparently vouched that the children's presence in a common area of an unlocked building on a public university's campus was, indeed, sanctioned.

As she related what happened, Ms. Thompson was visibly shaken. She did not say—but there was a clear understanding among many in the room, reflected in the stony-faced nods,

[10] Wayne State University Police are all commissioned Detroit Police officers (CICEP, 2016).

affirmations and silences of the Black college students who comprised the majority of the senior staff—that she was deeply concerned about the possibilities for police violence against the youth. After relaying the story, Ms. Thompson stopped speaking abruptly, saying "I have a lot of thoughts and feelings I'm trying to manage right now." Others in the room took up the topic, including Cohen and some of the CIs. Between them, they clarified (with Ms. Thompson nodding vehemently) two priorities: trying to ensure no police contact with the youth in the future and making a plan were it to happen anyway. At the end of a ten-minute discussion—some of which was devoted to inquiries about how the youth who had been targeted were doing—the group of senior staff agreed on next steps. Ms. Thompson would contact the campus police and arrange a meeting with them. In that meeting, she would assert that if there were any noise complaints or complaints about kids or teenagers in the building, that the police would communicate with her directly before coming to the building. The group nodded, still solemn, as they moved on to the next agenda item.

I noted that Ms. Thompson and the CIs participated the most in this conversation. All senior staff members present communicated concern for the youths' well-being after the incident, but the issue of systemic police violence seemed like a particular frequency of the conversation that reverberated between Ms. Thompson and the CIs. I later confirmed that specific research has shown how racist policing impacts youth of color in Detroit—and particularly Black youth. Detroit youth of color face racialized threats of surveillance and punishment, including a state-supported school-to-prison-nexus (Nelson, 2018) and disproportionately high interactions with police officers (Jay & Conklin, 2017). With camp ending in a matter of days, I did not witness another update about the program's response. I continued to wonder about the seemingly layered conversation I had observed, in which some

members of the staff appeared to silently share an understanding of patterns of anti-Black police brutality and others appeared not to.

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About 50 weeks later, in the summer of 2019, I returned for another period of research with KMC. The building the program typically used—the building in which a police officer made a group of Black children feel unsafe and unwelcome—was being renovated. Instead of the minimal transit between two adjacent buildings on one block of campus, all the youth, young adults, and KMC staff had to walk across the street to their temporary building for that year. The intersection they crossed (Warren and Cass Avenues) was a busy one, especially in morning rush hour. Following a stream of 200 Black, Bengali Muslim, and Latinx youth across the street, I was taken aback when I looked up and saw police officers at all four sides of the intersection. With their cars parked horizontally, blocking traffic, I watched four officers stand in the sidewalks, allowing the youth to cross unimpeded by traffic. Each subsequent time I observed this procedure, I looked around me and wondered: *Were the kids OK with this? Whose idea was this? When and how did this happen?*

One day, a Bengali Muslim TA named Chandira walked by me in the middle of the crosswalk. A police officer stood five feet away from her, body squared against the cars waiting to pass. "It's so cool, right? Like, we have *the police* protecting us," Chandira said. I gave her a short nod to let her know I had heard her. Inwardly, though, I grimaced, noting that her comment hung in the air, unendorsed by the Black children surrounding us. *The traffic at this intersection is really intense*, I thought. *And there is no way 200-plus people could cross in a timely or safe fashion with a 15-second walk signal.* Logistically, I understood how this particular, isolated choice could have been made. It did not stop me chafing at the deep perverseness of the

situation: someone in the program had negotiated with the police that they would offer daily protection of the same children they were liable to harass and harm—whom one of them *did* harass a year earlier. The persistence of race-evasive, individualistic conceptions of care that these series of events represented demonstrated the limits of white feminist care theories for advancing social justice (Thompson, 1998). Still, youth continued to take up the discourse of KMC as a safe and caring place.

**Negotiating Necessities: Safety, Food, and Money**

In interviews, the majority of youth and adults in the program considered KMC "a safe place"—at least in some generic sense—and indicated that the safe environment was both a function and affirmation of the program's focus on care. Both youth and adults positioned safety in the program as existing in direct contrast to acts of individual violence happening in the world outside the program. Adults in the program, particularly, advanced this discursive framing, locating safety "inside" KMC and danger "outside" KMC. One focus of this framing was conversation and interaction around the program's "Rules for Kids." The third and final rule was "Be Safe."

I observed Cohen emphasize the "Rules for Kids" several times in the morning assemblies. In one assembly, he said:

> The way to live in this world is through kindness, and care, and being decent, and not trying to tear each other down...Finding your greatness will never ever mean finding your perfection… Make your mistakes—it's fine! There is one mistake you can't make here. That's violence… I've been to too many funerals; I can't go to anymore. I know this is radical.

He then went on to implore students to stay away from "horseplay," describing how so often physical harms can happen from interactions that begin with good intentions—and again framing violence as an individual behavior that requires individual discipline to prevent. Nearly half of the kids and TAs I interviewed echoed Cohen's specific point about "horseplay." Raven closely echoed Cohen's language when she told me, "So, there's a rule here, and it's like, 'No horseplay,' 'cause PC doesn't want to go to no more funerals or no more hospitals." Chokri said the program's emphasis on "no violence" was simply because "We don't want anyone getting hurt here because we're trying to have a safe environment for people." In this discourse, each child in the program was responsible for keeping violence "outside." This kind of association—of care operating in such a way that its existence requires the absence of harm—is related to patterns of white racial innocence that idealize care as a way of rejecting responsibility for systemic racial oppression and privilege (Thompson, 1998).

Notably, the discourse of individual responsibility positioned care (safety) and harm (violence) as mutually exclusive. I observed this discourse recurring between the first and second years of data collection in a particular way. In the first year of my study, at one morning assembly toward the end of the camp, Cohen shared an anecdote about practicing care with the gathered youth. He described going on a bike ride with his kids in Detroit and passing a houseless person who, he assumed, was having some type of mental health crisis. He said that at first they kept riding their bikes, but then: "I kept thinking about the example I was setting for my children. It would be easier for me to go on by—but I turned around and went back." After sharing how he attempted to offer help to the person (including calling the police), Cohen said, "Listen, the *real* story is that *I kept going*. It wasn't until a block later that my better self took over. Being kind is easy. But not being kind is easier sometimes." When he shared this, I thought

back to the first day of camp. Flipping back in my field notes, I re-read his words: “Some of us aren’t treated right, whether that be because of race, religion, or something else.” The consistent framing Cohen offered was that harm and care were binary choices in matters of individual will and morality. Cohen’s implicit message, whether he intended it or not, was to diminish the importance of social, political, cultural, and historical contexts—knowledge that is central to critical care praxis (Sosa-Provencio, 2019). The practical message for youth was one that CBE scholars have identified with neoliberal theories of change: individual actions with individual resources are the only means for participating in the social world (Baldridge, 2019; Lipman, 2013).

A year later, I heard Cohen tell the same story about his delayed conscience. He began his address to the program youth by sharing some news about a tragic event that occurred on campus. It had been clear when I arrived at the program that something unusual was going on—the senior staff were communicating with one another in quiet whispers, one-on-one, and the typically-punctual Cohen was not yet in the auditorium when the assembly was supposed to start at 9:30. At 9:45, Cohen took the stage and, looking very somber, gave the youth some news: Someone was found dead on campus that morning in the building the program was usually housed in. Cohen looked like he was holding back tears, and I watched as every student I could see started doing the “support” hand motion. Cohen went on: “I cannot report to you *anything* about this person. And in the end, does it matter? The *only* thing I know for sure was that this was a human being.” I watched as about half the rolling “support” motions broke into waggling “agreement” signals. Cohen went on, saying to the kids that he hoped they “start to believe as well [that] every one of you is unique and beautiful and irreplaceable,” just like the person who died was unique, and beautiful, and irreplaceable. “I can’t help but think,” Cohen mused aloud,

"that a person whose life ends on a college campus can't have had the most happy story in the world. I'm feeling like there was a loneliness to their death. (Pause) It made me think about how we talk about kindness… Kindness is really hard. It doesn't come naturally to us." After once again telling the same story about turning around on the bike ride with his kids, Cohen said:

> Kindness can be hard, but it's not impossible. Give that part of you that's inside that's beautiful—you give that part of you a chance. It took that part of me two blocks to get the rest of me to turn around.... On the first day this summer, I asked, "Who here has been impacted by violence?" And so many of us raised our hands. I think that part of changing the world is not getting used to this stuff…. Don't you *ever, ever* doubt it: you are irreplaceable.

During Cohen's sharing, I watched as the vast majority of the youth continued to alternate between doing the "support" motion and the "agree motion" in response to Cohen's words. I wanted to know: *Which parts, exactly, did they support and which parts, exactly did they agree with?* Cohen had communicated values that could facilitate individual care—but framing individual kindness and care as responses to individual needs removes kindness and care from interacting with racist, classist, and ableist systems of neglect and harm. This individualistic framing—with its clear and direct messaging of individual care and value for the children—ignored systems that harm people of color, like policing. It also communicated what Watson et al. (2016) identified as a theme in white notions of care, which is the idea of linearly developing trust. While subtler in Cohen's messaging, the sum of these programmatic communications over time communicates an expectation that youths' individual understandings of care will grow steadily over time. Critical care praxis, however, includes attention to interdependent relationships that require reflection, accountability, and repair (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

Data does reveal that nearly all of the youth and the two college students I interviewed took up, at least partially, this dyadic framing, wherein individual safety (care) existed in opposition to individual violence (harm). In doing so, they also reified the discourse about safety existing inside KMC and violence existing outside KMC. For instance, Marcel and Maya, both CIs and former youth in the program, explained that they felt like KMC was a safe place for kids that was qualitatively different from what they might experience outside the program. Marcel said, "I think it's a safe haven for our younger kids, for them to experience something outside of like the stuff in Detroit." When I asked him to explain what he meant by "the stuff," Marcel said, "Like if you go on the street and try to say hello to someone they might look at you like, "Why are you talking to me?" Marcel's explanation named individual interactions as the "stuff in Detroit" that threatened children's safety.

Five youth named their particular experiences with harm and neglect in schools and in their personal lives as dialectically opposed to the program's conception of care. For instance, Carlotta and I had the following exchange:

> Me: [Referencing a passing comment from a few weeks prior] So I believe you said something like, 'If school were like KMC, then there wouldn't be any more violence." I was wondering if you could just explain that a little bit more?
>
> Carlotta: I said that because, here, they'll let you know that you're not going to be harmed in no certain ways and (thoughtful pause) I feel like Dr. Cohen can finish what Dr. Martin Luther King did if he really had more people learning and knowing what this program can do. You wouldn't see no harm, because nobody here had ever got shot, killed, sexually assaulted, nothing. The only thing that he doesn't want to see is someone get hurt.

I wanted to understand more about how Carlotta was framing the normal course of events as including shootings, killings, and sexual assault. I later looked up the statistics for sexual assault crimes recorded by Detroit police that occurred in the vicinity of the Wayne State campus and those that occurred in the vicinity of Carlotta's school. Over the past four years, there were five sexual assaults recorded near Wayne State and there were greater than 40 recorded near Carlotta's school—a school located in an area zoned for disinvestment (City of Detroit, 2021). Still, even as Carlotta shared her imagination of schools without violence, she ascribed her understanding of care in KMC to Cohen's individual commitments. She evoked a comparison between Cohen and Dr. King, erasing the distinction between a one-person movement and movement leader.

Later in our conversation, Carlotta shared that experiencing this program's emphasis on safety influenced her to reconsider some of her own self-harming behaviors and how she responded to an act of violence outside of the program. She shared that after her brother[11] was killed in a hit-and-run car accident, she experienced suicidal ideation and started cutting herself. Returning to KMC the summer after his death, Carlotta said she realized that her behavior was unsafe. Moreover, she felt that learning to practice safe behaviors herself was a way of showing care in KMC because "people really look up to me, and I look up to them, and if I was gone, there's no one that could replace me as a person." Once again, I noted the echo of Cohen's language about each person being irreplaceable. I also noted that Carlotta had named her own very personal—and individual—experiences of hurt and violence as being related to her understanding of care in KMC. The strong sense of belonging she felt in the program was

[11] Carlotta was referring to her non-biological brother, but someone who she identified as her brother in terms of relationship. Following Nelson (2013), I do not refer to this as a fictive kin relationship, with attention to how dominant white discourses position "fictive kin" relationships as inherently less important than biological kin relationships.

influential in her own meaning-making. So, even though the larger discourse about safety and violence continued to advance a problematic focus on individual responsibility, we also can identify how individuals made meaning about these notions in combination with their meaning-making about belonging in the program.

Of the TAs I interviewed, Chandira was the only one who explicitly named systemic privilege and oppression as part of her meaning-making about how KMC demonstrated care through attention to safety. Chandira explained that it meant a lot to her to work "in a safe environment," comparing her safety at KMC to the safety of her friends working at Kroger and Family Dollar, in neighborhoods outside the greater downtown development zone. Her reference to Family Dollar, in particular, seemed significant. Chandira had also shared that a woman had recently issued a verbal Islamophobic attack on Chandira and Chandira's mother when they were shopping at the store. She said that at KMC she felt safe as a Bengali Muslim girl who wears *hijab*, "but then right after you walk out those doors again, it's like (with a resigned tone and pursed lips) "Okay." Chandira adopted the discourse of safety inside KMC relative to the Islamophobia she experienced outside the program. This example also speaks to how CBE spaces—even those that do not engage in broad critical care praxis—do still serve as unique caring environments with regards to their organizational culture and relationships (Baldridge et al., 2017).

While nearly all youth took up the idea of care as an individual act, some youth demonstrated ambivalence about the implications of maintaining KMC as a site that uniquely enforced or incubated that individual responsibility. Specifically, three of the youth expressed ambivalence around the program's policy about automatically expelling anyone who participated in violence (self-defense excepted). In the first year of my observation, there were two incidents

that surfaced tensions around this policy. Both incidents had to do with youth "horse playing." After one incident, I heard Cohen explain in a senior staff meeting that "The word 'automatic' is different in KMC, just like everything else. There will always be a discussion. Everyone will be heard; there is no censorship. And we will *never* consider an expulsion before we share and honor the child's goodness." Still, he went on to say that a "sacred thing" was that "there will be no violence in this program. And violence means having hostile intent." Cohen was concerned that horseplay could easily escalate into hostility. On multiple occasions, I had heard Cohen vehemently express his belief that "there is no such thing as a bad kid; there are only good kids who sometimes do bad things." In many ways, Cohen expressed an asset-based view of children as whole people—a knowledge involved in critical care praxis (Valenzuela, 1999). He and program leadership maintained that expulsion from the program for a summer was not permanent expulsion, and it was not a judgment on the child's goodness. Still, they argued, it was necessary to preserve KMC as a site where no one acted with hostile intent. Without making a judgment about the policy writ large, this data does show that Cohen and other program leadership still considered holding individual youth accountable as reasonable accountability—without considering what larger, systemic repairs may also be called for (Annamma, 2017).

The three youth who spoke of this particular incident shared a more tempered take than the adults. Marisha, an eighth-grader, first drew a comparison between KMC policy and the policies in school:

> You know how kids can argue or be 'bout to fight? Here, they don't let it slide. They are (makes a stern face), "you're leaving." At school, it's like—it's a lotta leeway on that part of it, like, it's not gonna be, like, "oh, we're gonna send you home." Especially not at my

> school. If you, like, *really* fighting, they're gonna of course have to suspend you. Here it's like, if it's anything close to an altercation, you're getting out. You're done.

When asked Marisha what she thought of the policy, she said she had a mixed opinion. “It keeps the kids safe! We’re very conscious that they're not just gonna get away with something,” she said. “But, at the same time, it's, like, everybody makes a mistake. Everybody does something that's, like, not smart.” Marisha’s ambivalence signaled an appreciation for the program maintaining its status as a “safe place,” but also indicated that expulsion would often punish kids for making human mistakes. Similarly, Deon and Raven made and negotiated meanings of care when their friend was excluded from the program after hurting Raven while rough-housing. Like Marisha, Raven explained:

> I kinda agree with them but I kinda don’t. Because if the person that they were horsin’ around with says that they could come back—I mean, I understand that you don’t want them to do it to another person, but just give them one more chance.

Even while she interpreted the program’s prohibition of horseplay as a genuine outgrowth of Cohen’s desire to not see anyone hurt, Raven saw exclusion from the program as being positioned against care, too. In short, expulsion from “inside” the program’s care environment preserved the programmatic ideal of care while hurting the child being expelled. Related to this tension, Raven explained that she continued to express care for her friend since his exclusion by regularly calling him and going over her notes and events from the day—and even by leaving a call open with him during class so he could overhear the goings on. She explained that she did all this because “I want him to still feel like he’s in KMC, just not present.” Youth valued their connection with KMC. They wanted to continue belonging in the program, and they felt deep compassion for peers who were removed from it. Deon said that he understood this tension as

relating to being in the KMC "family"—a metaphor I heard many people use across contexts, but that seemed particularly loaded in the context of expulsion. Deon said:

> Because horseplay here, you could either get suspended or expelled. But that still doesn't mean that you're not part of the family even though you're not with us 'cause that just means that you have to go, you have to leave, and think about what you've done, and next summer, when you come back, just don't do that no more…. [speaking of his and Raven's friend who was expelled] He got kicked out because of horseplay. But he was *so* sad when he got kicked out. He knew he did something wrong, too. Like, he knew it, and he was—he kept trying to tell, he was like, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," but PC kept [saying] like, "I know you're sorry. I really do, but I have to suspend you."

Remaining a part of the program "family" was all the more valuable when the "family" was associated with safety. Deon and others (including Jamal, Raven, Cohen, Lowell, and Mahalia) explicitly said that even if a child had to leave, they were still a part of the family. Framing care as an individual act, as one uniquely situated within the program, and as a familial relationship effectively allowed the program to preserve a narrative of extending individual care to kids while moving them outside the program's self-styled domain of care and safety.

While themes of safety and violence were much more prominent in program-wide discourses of care, the younger kids I interviewed did place particular emphasis on sharing food and money as forms of practicing individual acts of care. A majority of the kids said that they had either bought food for someone else or that someone else had bought them food and they identified these interactions as acts of care that were significant in the KMC culture. When I asked Deon how he could tell if people cared about each other in KMC, he shared a time when:

> ...somebody didn't want me to tell our CI they didn't have a lunch and all that. But after I told her, they're like, 'Thank you, Deon. I wouldn't have did it myself; I was too shy to ask. I didn't want to ask for money.' I said, 'It's no problem! I would've gave you the money myself, but I didn't have nothing.'

Deon's explanation highlighted an important dimension of the individual gifting of food and money: for those who could not give directly themselves, they could still show individual care by helping facilitate someone else's giving. While Deon's stories of providing money or food were the most detailed, four of the other younger kids mentioned such interactions as examples of times they felt or expressed care in the program. Central to their recounting of these experiences was their active participation in a caring activity. All five who named these experiences readily described them as evidence of their care. While still situating care in the individual realm, these instances also revealed a value that the kids had for practicing care with one another—a value connected to a kind of ad hoc resource network. Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) explained that it is a mistake to understand social capital as "perfunctory" and "task-specific" (p. xvii). Instead, we can understand that social capital can transform interactions and relationships in ways that challenge dominant transactional, zero-sum dynamics. By building a sense of community power and solidarity, social capital can support youths' self-advocacy and activism.

In its programmatic commitment to individualistic care, KMC often missed opportunities to identify how youths' relations with one another and with the program revealed issues around which they could potentially support youths' social consciousness and advocacy. For instance, two of the younger kids contrasted what they judged as quality choices about food in KMC to the lack of quality and/or choice of food in schools. Basirah explained that having "good" options was significant because, in her school, she and other students disliked the lunch food options so

much that "most of it goes to the trash, to be honest." Zacarias explained that having options he liked was one way he felt "freedom" in KMC. While not amounting to a sociopolitical analysis, these two youths' thinking about choice and quality of food as evidence of KMC being a "caring" program is meaningful. It demonstrates how youth associated care with a dynamic of needs provision, but in a way involved their participation in deciding how their needs would be met. As I referenced earlier, it also spoke to a potential opportunity to consider how youths' socioeconomic experiences shaped their meaning-making about care in the program. As I discuss later in this chapter and the next, nearly all of the youth discussed some circumstance related to the theme that having participatory power and choice was a factor in their assessment of the program's care for them. Still, the majority of these mentions—like Zacarias' and Basirah's—spoke to the significance of individual participation.

**Potential Support: Family Needs and Educational Opportunities**

The metaphor of KMC as a family extended into youths' meaning-making about the program's offers of educational opportunities and, in some cases, personal financial support. Carlotta was the only younger kid who mentioned this latter kind of extended network of support. Carlotta's mom was part of the KMC when she was a high schooler. Carlotta shared that

> My mom had me when she'd just graduated high school so Dr. Cohen was really like, in our family. Because she did it when she was a seventeen-year-old, and so ever since then he paid for her to go to college. So, she did all her school and now she has three beautiful children. I'm the oldest. It was kind of difficult for us to get her in college 'cause I was born. She needed diapers and clothes for me, so he helped us out and then she got to finish and graduate from college.

Carlotta's understanding of how care was evidenced in the program was informed by the support that Cohen previously offered her mother. In a related—but not identical way—Chandira shared that being paid as a TA in the KMC allowed her to contribute to her family financially, including by buying gifts for her mom and sister. Chandira was the only TA who verbalized a connection between being paid and her own acts of care for her loved ones. The fact that the KMC program had facilitated individual support for members outside of the program context both heightened the stakes of membership and reinforced the notion of care being an especial quality of the program itself. For instance, Alyssa Brown, the seventh-grade supervisor during the second summer of my data collection, shared that she had not been involved with KMC for several years when her husband died. Alyssa told me she did not contact anyone at KMC directly, and so she presumed the KMC "family" must have been activated when she received a sympathy card from the program staff, along with some financial support to help her pay for funeral expenses. I do not mean to denigrate the personal impact or meaning of the program's financial support and employment of youth. Instead, I want to highlight that the personal impact and meaning is deeply related to reinforcing a discourse about caring for individuals, often in response to perceived needs, in a way that highlights the personal stakes for remaining in the KMC "family."

***Educational Needs and Opportunities***

Data showed that youth also perceived KMC as caring for them by their assessment that the program was responding to their educational needs. KMC affiliation with Wayne State University and its mathematics curriculum were both relevant factors in youths' discussions of this aspect of program care. Furthermore, several of the youth explained their needs in terms of (a) how they felt their needs were not being met outside the program and/or (b) what they needed in order to achieve success. For instance, Marisha expressed that she valued participating in

KMC as a way of "being ahead of the game" compared to her friends who, "during the summer are at home." Marisha pointed out that part of her appreciation for the educational opportunity was linked to her understanding that, as a Black girl interested in going into medicine, she felt pressure to be a high-achiever. In doing so, Marisha was speaking to how Black girls experience a dual hyper-visibilization and invisibilization in education settings that are both fundamentally rooted in their intersectional experiences of racism and sexism (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007).

Additionally, four of the younger kids shared that participating in the program helped them feel more supported and prepared for college. The younger kids told me that being on a college campus was powerful to them. Deon put it succinctly when he said, "To be going to the eighth grade and you're on a college campus every summer—that's just cool to me." Hailey also shared a similarly concise appreciation for the college environment, indicating that it felt special to her. Basirah said that her participation in KMC was motivated in part because the program was connected to scholarship opportunities and academic support services at Wayne State. All of these examples communicate a theme of the program practicing care by increasing the youths' competitive resources—a discourse of care that takes on added weight in a heavily marketized educational landscape (Pedroni, 2011).

A few of the youth positively appraised KMC mathematics courses and teachers, dialectically positioning them against their experiences and perceptions of Detroit schools. For instance, Raven mentioned that taking the seventh-grade Calculus Discovery class in KMC felt like a good opportunity to her because she did not think that Detroit high schools even offered Calculus. Regardless of the specific courses offered at each Detroit high school, Raven's perception of what opportunities were available to her in school mathematics related to her positive appraisal of the content in KMC vis-a-vis a negative appraisal of Detroit schools. Raven

and Owen both also described how their math learning in the program was compensatory for issues with mathematics education in Detroit schools. Owen explained:

> When you go to a school, especially in DPS, it's like, if you get a good teacher, you get a good teacher, you like actually learn, you get good education. But if you don't, or don't have a teacher, then it's like, you know [resigned, procedural tone] 'Pass.' It's tough. Like eighth grade, I didn't have a math teacher for like most of the year. And so, being in the KMC actually helped me...It was like a sub came for most of the days, and then they got a replacement teacher, but she tried to teach for a while, and then after that, after she left, our actual teacher came back and she didn't really teach us 'cause the school year was almost over.

Raven also reported that she did not have a mathematics teacher for most of her prior school year. Her teacher, she said, had gotten sick the first week of school and had not returned. Raven explained that she entered KMC feeling extremely behind in her mathematics learning:

> But we had a sub all year and we didn't learn anything. Literally, we walked in the class and we just sat there and talked all day. Or if the sub didn't come, we'd just have to combine with all these seventh and eighth graders. And unfortunately, the teachers have to stop learning what they're learning, and piggyback on what we need to be learning. And we don't—we barely even know fractions right now. I came into this [after sixth grade] not even knowing half my multiplication facts. I know the basic: 1s, 2s, 3s, 4s, 11s. But I struggled with multiplication and division very bad. But now I'm starting to get better at it. It's not 100 percent, but it's close. It's at least good enough that I can go to seventh grade and I can get it, but it's going to take me a little bit.

Like Owen, Raven's critique was not about one teacher, but about an ongoing, systemic teacher shortage in Detroit that has deprived youth of essential educational resources (Thiel, 2019). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Black youth experience systemic marginalization in school mathematics (Martin, 2013). Moreover, their exclusion from or unrecognized achievement in school mathematics can increase their vulnerability to the school-to-prison nexus (Bullock & Meiners, 2019). Again, the data show that youth valued what KMC provided by relating it dialectically to what they perceived their schools as providing. This echoes findings from Baldridge et al.'s (2017) review of CBE literature. It also relates to Burman and Miles' (2020) explanation that despite vast heterogeneity in outside-of-school programs—including significant differences in racial ideologies—their position outside the "mainstream" can discursively overemphasize the actual distinctions between these programs and schools. Proponents of critical care praxis argue that making contexts of racism and the political nature of care part of the "content" in education introduces a reflexivity to instruction (Ginwright, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013). So, by using critical care praxis, CBEs can interrogate ways they are and are not instantiating dominant schooling relations and content.

### Normative Relational Expectations: Individuality, Tolerance, and Whiteness

The program's normative conceptions of care as individual, as responsive to individuals' (perceived) needs, and as something associated with positive feelings all contributed to normative relational expectations in the program. These normative expectations included an emphasis on accepting individuals and expressing that acceptance through affective affirmation. Conversely, this emphasis associated interpersonal challenge or conflict with a lack of care.

**Affirmative Acceptance of People's Individuality**

A normative understanding of care that I observed people communicate and practice in the program was expressing care through accepting people's individuality—and expressing that acceptance as affirmation. There were many ways in which the ubiquity of affirmative acceptance in KMC seemed to facilitate youths' trust in the program as a caring place. Zacarias and I had the following exchange:

> Me: What responsibilities or obligations do you have as a member of KMC?
>
> Zacarias: Doing your homework… (thoughtful silence). And doing your best. Doing your best as yourself.
>
> Me: "As yourself." What do you mean by that?
>
> Zacarias: Like just be yourself. Don't act different, like other than yourself, and you gotta try to be the best of *you*.

In this interview and others, as well as in several interactions during my participant-observations, students referenced the KMC "Rules for Kids"—the first of which was "Be Yourself"—as evidence that the program's emphasis on affirmative acceptance was commensurate with encouraging self-expression.

In one of my early conversations with Cohen, he explained that the KMC had no dress code because clothes are a matter of expression, and "if you love children, you should want them to be themselves." Relatedly, in my data analysis, I documented that nearly every younger kid mentioned a sign posted on the wall at the entrance as an encouragement to express themselves. The sign read, "Welcome to KMC / Please remove your mask" (this was in the summers of 2018 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, and referred to (un)masking one's individuality). Carlotta explained the significance of the sign to her, saying it means, "Like, let yourself show,

‘cause here we can wear whatever we want. We don’t have—Site Two is different, they have specific days where they get to wear stuff. Here, we can come with pajamas on. Everybody won’t say nothing.” She also named that the culture of the program was one where she felt supported by her peers to wear what she wanted without fear of judgment. Carlotta and other kids attributed their feelings of support to the KMC culture and explained that their peers, mentors, and adults in the program would both affirm their efforts to express themselves and withhold judgment. The close association of these two functions of individual acceptance—affirming efforts at self-expression and withholding judgment—is fraught in the potential contradictions it invites. Still, critical care scholars have written about how individual affirmation and acceptance can be meaningful in helping youth build a sense of trust, safety, and connection (Ginwright, 2010).

Other participant-observation and interview data show that the program’s practices of including extracurricular activities and establishing rituals around affirming self-expression reinforced the relational norm of showing care by affirming individuals’ self-expression. When I asked Zacarias if he expressed any particular parts of his identity at KMC, he said, “Usually at Family Meal, ‘cause you get to show off your skills in any sport or anything like that. Like you get to express yourself right there. Any talents you have, you could do it.” Other students expressed similar appreciation for the formal and informal opportunities they had to participate in activities they felt were tied to their self-identity. For Raven, this was participating in the student-led dance team, because it approximated her love of cheer (“Cheer is my life!”). A particular group of boys became excited early in the summer when they learned that a KMC alum and professional chess master was going to come visit one day during the last week of camp and that anyone who was interested could play him in a simultaneous tournament. Over the

next several weeks, I observed them gathering during unstructured times and structured game-play times to practice playing chess together. In the fifth week of the camp, I witnessed a seventh-grader named Nick—a boy who had been relatively quiet in larger group settings up until that point—stand up in the morning assembly and sing *a capella*, as nearly all other students in the auditorium signaled their support through the program's non-verbal "support" signal (a signal originally created by kids). I also observed frequent occurrences when other kids, student-staff, and senior staff would provide encouraging comments to kids about their participation and self-expression. For the kids in KMC, an important expectation of caring practice in the program was having arenas where they could express themselves in various ways and receive affirmation for that expression.

While nearly all of the students positively appraised KMC as a place where they could be themselves, a little less than half of the youth and young adults I interviewed contrasted that acceptance with what they experienced at school. Mahalia shared an example of how the social support she received in KMC was different from what she had experienced in school, and how that experience related to her own growth. She shared:

> last year I was talking about how I was bullied [in school] and people didn't care about me and how I didn't feel worthy and I cried. I was sitting like right there (gestures at another desk) crying…[I said to the other TAs] "I never really felt this way before and you guys care about me and I'm thankful for you guys being my friends," and this girl I went to middle school with—she didn't *bully* me, but she was like (makes a wary face)—I was like, "thank you for letting me sit next to you" and she started crying too, 'cause she let me sit next to her and she probably didn't think it was a big deal, but it was a big deal to me...And when I was done crying, everybody said something about me. Like

> everybody was like, "Mahalia, thank you for your bravery"... and so many people connected with the thing. Once you're open, they're being open because you're open, so there's caring and positivity…. I don't have the best self-esteem right now. I'm working on it. Or self love. But it was really horrible before KMC… I didn't think I was worthy of *nothing*. Right now? 'Cause now I can look at myself in the mirror more and more and just [think]: I'm *me*. Not, 'I'm bad.' I'm just *me*. That's a really big step for me to have over six weeks! I'm not bad, I'm just me.

Owen linked the emphasis on affirmative acceptance of people to his own meaningful personal growth. He said he thought participating in the program "really changed me for the better, like a lot. Because when I came in as a nine...I was very antisocial...throughout the entire thing as a student, maybe I talked to three or four people." As a student, Owen felt supported but not yet social himself. However, after he became a TA and was responsible for caring with and for other kids, he said "it just really opened me up, like made me able to talk to people and make friends and be more social and stuff like that, and nurtured my goofy side where I can just have a good time." Owen's explanation highlighted something reflected heavily in my field notes: the relational norms around individual affirmation and acceptance encouraged verbal expressions of praise and encouragement. They also related to the program's emphasis on humor; in the KMC "Rules for Staff," number 13 was "Be silly with kids." Scholars have argued that having fun and having a sense of humor can align with liberatory pedagogies (hooks, 1994; Lopez, 2015)—but fun and humor are entangled with power relations. While I observed and heard youth describe the relational norms of affirmative acceptance and humor as meaningful to them, I also witnessed program discourses that associated affirmative acceptance and humor as dynamics indicative not only of equal humanity but more specifically of equivalent power. For instance, a

Black kid joking with a white adult does not hold the same institutional power as that adult. If the kid makes an ill-conceived joke, the adult still has more formal authority. If the adult makes an ill-conceived joke to the kid, the adult still has more formal authority. Put simply, having equitable relationships between kids and adults—including relationships that allow for humor and acceptance —is not compatible with ignoring power differences. The work of critical care scholars, such as that of Ginwright (2010) and Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006), suggests that adults must take care to be aware of their status and power rather than ignore it. Ginwright explicitly named that healing dominant patterns in youth-adult relationships calls for "decentering power from adults"—not assuming power neutrality (p. 86).

In particular, the two co-founders participated in a number of routines at the morning assembly that messaged the expectation of affirmative acceptance—including the notion that having a good sense of humor meant tolerating others. Lowell had the title in the program of "Minister of Humor," and so he was responsible for telling jokes at morning assemblies. So, one routine had Lowell lean into a reputation for telling unfunny jokes (usually puns) while Cohen joined the youth in assessing the joke as funny or unfunny—an assessment that had its own hand signal. I observed that, nearly all the time, the youth and Cohen would judge the joke as unfunny—but the unfunny nature of the jokes became part of the bit. This act served to build a routine wherein everyone participated in accepting Lowell's bad humor as a part of his individual personhood. The first day of camp in the first year of my observation, Cohen did his own daily comedy routine. After the youth clapped and cheered for him, he addressed them by saying:

> It's an amazing thing, having people give you attention… It's like you feel like you matter. It's a wonderful feeling. And you guys do that. You make people feel like they're

> something, and that's beautiful…In the next six weeks, we're creating our own world. The KMC world. And you do it by putting it in the hands of your kids. Here's what the world could look like if people were decent to each other.

When it was Lowell's turn to talk, he gestured at Cohen from his perch in the back of the auditorium and said loudly, "Watch out kids. Dr. Cohen is actually 32 years old—this is just what drugs and alcohol can do!" I noted that some of the returning youth gamely employed the "funny or not funny?" signal, but I felt uncomfortable with the joke. However, KMC's emphasis on expressing care through affirmative acceptance sanctioned this joke as something to be brooked with good humor. I came to learn that this programmatic norm supported tolerance of some behaviors that were problematic unto themselves and that also invoked systemic violence against youth of color. As suggested by the selection of data I have shared above, youth and adult participants rarely mentioned race in their discussions—with me and with each other—about accepting individuality in the program. As I discuss below, while I had some discussions with participants about race, they often reified the notion of race-evasive care as individually caring.

**Expressing Racial Identity and Protecting Whiteness**

Accepting problematic behaviors was ultimately a pattern that contributed to a programmatic discourse that associated care with color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017) and with individual rhetorics of care. The emphasis on affirmative acceptance seemed to transmute into a value for acknowledging cultural differences (to some extent) while denying racial power differences—and particularly without acknowledging the oppressiveness of white normativity. Put another way, "affirmative acceptance" as the norm for communicating care meant that people could express themselves insofar as doing so would not impugn anyone else.

This dynamic is evidenced in the data by two youth, two TAs, and three senior staff members—all but one of whom identified as Black—echoing language like that of white KMC co-founder Bob Lowell, in his response to my question, "Do you think anything related to race matters in the KMC?":

> On one hand, we're different, we have different cultures, we have different backgrounds. But that's wonderful! That's something to celebrate and enjoy and understand. But at the same time, we're all the same. So, you know, this thing about racial issues, that's the message that we give and I think that our kids are much better attuned to that then the outside world, unfortunately.

At various points, Marcel, Maya, and Jamal all used language similar to Lowell's to assert the non-mattering of race in the KMC, saying things like "I don't think race matters—everybody is welcome," and that, at the senior staff level, "We're more mature. We understand the world more. We understand how to interact with each other more. Race is not a *thing* to us."

Only some youth, both in interviews and observations, explicitly discussed how race (and, in the case of Bengali Muslim youth, racialized ethnicity and religion) interacted with conceptions of care in KMC. As discussed in Chapter 3, my access to the camp was contingent on my agreement to only ask about race in a very constrained and indirect way—after which, *if* youth explicitly named race in their response, I could ask follow-up questions. Furthermore, I had anticipated that my white identity may factor into how participants of all races responded to me (e.g. white participants may assume racial solidarity and participants of color may be reasonably wary of sharing perspectives with me). With this in mind, much of the discourse I heard from interviewees and in my participant-observation about race and racism aligned with the program's norm of practicing affirmative acceptance. Of the nine interviewees who

mentioned race, seven included some indication of acknowledging of systemic racism. Still, in the context of discussing caring interactions in the program, four interviewees maintained that race *did not* matter in terms of care in the program.

In my interview with Lowell, he responded to my open questioning about how race might matter in the program in ways that signaled color-evasiveness and liberal white racism. Discourses of liberal white racism often involve emphasizing an abstract universal equality that is contradicted by reality and that protects the normativity of white ways of being, doing, and knowing (Annamma et al., 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Feagin, 2020). For context: in Lowell's response to my question, he referenced a particular assembly, during which a Ghanaian delegation visited the KMC. Nana Osim Kwatia II, chief of Amanokrom and Gyasehene of Akuapem, addressed the students to share about his Traditional Area's mathematics education efforts. Before Kwatia's address, KMC leadership played a YouTube video compiling clips of people from all over the world singing "Stand by Me" (the Ben E. King classic). Lowell's full response about whether race mattered in KMC was:

> Yes and no. Unfortunately, people from the outside are gonna say things like, 'Well how come white guys can discipline Black kids.' There's all that crap that's going on. But intrinsically that gets broken down pretty well. So as an example, I remember our very first Muslim kid, a beautiful girl named Rania. She came from—there's a pretty large Muslim community outside of Detroit, but there's also an enclave in Detroit—Hamtramck has had some large—there is a significant Middle Eastern community. So at any rate, Rania came and she was the only person who was Muslim. And she stood out, and she had her *hijab*-- and the whole thing--and everybody could tell she was different. And I heard her testify—I don't want to put words in her mouth, but she said, 'I was

> accepted right away.' Now, having said that, you know sometimes some junkola might erupt. You know, somebody might say something to a Hispanic kid or vice versa, but that gets handled in a loving way, and so I think overall this is a sanctuary from all that crap, and so the message is—well, OK, let me just say what I said at the assembly. (Addressing me to confirm that I was present at the assembly) Were you there for 'Playing for Change' and the prince and the chief?... The message was: all we know for sure is we come into this world together and we leave together. What we do in between is up to us. And so I—the power was that you saw people from different cultures singing the same song, so the message was *uni-verse*. What does that mean? One song.

While I provide a fuller analysis of Lowell's response in Chapter 6, here, it is important to note that a descriptive theme in Lowell's response is his assertion of raceless universality—not only as a humanistic ideal, but as a practical position. In Lowell's explanation, race only matters insofar as individual people make it matter (a perspective that is ahistorical and actively harmful). I also saw this racial frame reflected in the program's organizational norms—as with the senior staff's careful *not* naming of race after the incident between program TAs and police and the program's messaging about the diversity of KMC without engaging how that diversity might matter in terms of youths' experiences with school mathematics and relationships to racial discourses about their communities and about other students' communities.

In my participant-observation, I noticed a number of incidents in which Lowell interacted with kids in ways that did not acknowledge differences of power, including positionalities relative to age, gender, and race. The history of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in the United States has included extensive and ongoing creation and denigration of any markers that could signify Black people's "otherness" (Muhammad, 2010). Such markers have included

phenotypical—but not essential—features, like more tightly textured hair, and cultural naming traditions that vary from white, Christian, middle class norms. So, Lowell's disregard for racist power domination was reflected in some of his interactions. For example, passing by a Black student wearing their natural hair in an Afro style, Lowell said, "What, did you stick your finger in an electrical socket?!" I heard another student repeat the comment to the first student before they both disappeared around the corner. There were more interactions like this one—some of which I share in Chapter 5. However, I share this example as something representative of data showing how normative expectations about "caring" relations in the KMC linked to a pattern of tolerating Lowell's bad humor as an expression of self—which connected to a pattern of others ultimately accepting his invocation of racist tropes as a matter of self-expression. While explicitly racist behavior is not endorsed by white feminist care theories, we can understand how placing primacy on the individual relation as the measure of skillful care (see Noddings, 1988) misses enactments of care interacting with the whole educational context—including other ideas, people, and environmental elements circulating in the instructional dynamic.

Maya demonstrated how the association of acceptance, self-expression, and care in the program related to her meaning-making about Lowell's whiteness. She said:

> Mr. Lowell doesn't *use* white privilege, but the stereotype is definitely what the kids view him as. As opposed to DC—they view him as more of like just someone there for everybody and they view him as DC, not an older white guy. You know? Just being completely transparent. With Mr. Lowell, it's more of the older white guy look. Just because of the way he interacts with the kids or the way that he teaches. The way that—even something as small as a joke he makes or something like that. He definitely (trails off, pauses)—it sucks, but he definitely fits a lot of the stereotypes that the kids or just

> anybody would have toward white people. And so, you know, you can't fault him for it, 'cause it's who he is, but he's definitely one of those examples—no, he's not, you know, a person who exudes white *privilege*. He's not that kind of person. But when you look at the way you would expect someone with white privilege to act, he's kinda almost completely what you would think of, at least from the kids' point of view.

Maya's meaning-making about Lowell's racial subjectivity surfaced how the program's fixation on universal affirmative acceptance messaged the idea that someone could be individually caring or "good" and also perpetuate racist harm. A consequence of this, of course, is the continued protection of white racial innocence and virtue (Feagin, 2020).

By rhetorically denying that systemic racism could operate inside KMC, the program reinforced its discursive bounding of care. In this bounding, care operated reliably inside the program and was, at best, unreliable or incidental outside the program. Rather than reject any mention of race, the discourse of care served to categorize race as a "problem" associated with the outside world. So, when seeking to understand how the program advanced normative discourses of care in relation to race and education, I found that programmatic conceptions of care discursively distanced the program from engaging race. For instance, when I asked Jamal if "anything related to race matters in the KMC," he said:

> Yeah, I would say a lot of things like with the issues of race, we definitely bring it up...We're not like, turning a blind eye to it...but it's more of a 'that trash is happening out there, but it's not gonna happen like that here. And it does push that, like I said before, that we're all humans. But that message wouldn't exist if it wasn't an issue outside of camp.

Jamal's explanation was about how the program's conception of care opposed linking racial identity with humanity. A version of this sentiment was echoed by Lowell, Cohen, Maya, and to some extent Marcel—although all four did acknowledge racism as a societal problem in various ways. Still, they continued to assert that inside the KMC, racial hierarchy could not co-exist with their program's focus on care. Raven's discussion of race in the program supported this finding about race-evasive notions of care. She explained to me:

> But here, if we say anything like [about race], Professor Cohen, Mr. Lowell, they don't take it no type of way. And they feel—to me, race doesn't matter. We all the same people, it's just we have different colors and we all from different parts of the world. Like, as long as you not trying to kill anyone, I don't understand why race matters…. With PC—Professor Cohen—like if we'll come to him and talk to him about anything that relates to white people, Black people, he'll just listen. He won't say "No, no, don't talk about that." He'll actually listen to you and he'll actually go and like, face it. And also Mr. Lowell. Anybody here, to be honest!

Raven explained that Cohen's and Lowell's openness to students talking about race signaled that race did not matter to them. Mahalia used similar language when describing how outside of KMC, she and her peers felt deeply on guard when meeting a white person. She said that in the program, she had met many white people, "And it doesn't matter, it just matters how open you are to see past those things, see past who they are—not *who* they are, but see past to what they *feel* and what they are showing you." The youth members of KMC were clearly aware of race as identity and systemic power relation. However, the program's discourse of race-evasive care meant racism was an individual behavior perpetrated by bad actors outside of KMC and that

practicing care meant maintaining the idea that people inside the program could not participate in systemic racism.

**Diversity and Representation: Bounded Affirmation in Racial Discourses**

Even while the program advanced a discourse of care that tamped down talk of race, Black youth and adults did speak in affirming ways about the significance of racial representation as well as ethnic and religious diversity in the KMC. In doing so, they considered how the sociopolitics of care in education in their own experiences related to these same topics of representation and diversity. Scholars of critical care and critical care in teaching contexts have reinforced the idea that representation can matter tremendously (Rolón-Dow, 2006; Sosa-Provencio, 2019). However, Roberts (2010) pointed out that representation alone does not fulfill youths' needs to build relationships with adults who share their racial identities *and* who actively engage the youth in "color talk" (meaning-making about living in the world with their identity) and "political clarity" (acknowledging how systems of power structure social worlds around identity) (p. 458).

With regards to representation, three of the Black senior staff members I interviewed named the importance of seeing Black people succeeding and/or having Black role models. Maya told me how one of her own childhood experiences with representation had a profound influence on her:

> That's how I picked my career. I met a woman when I was in the fourth grade for career day. She was an engineer...She was the only one: she was the only woman that came; she was the only *Black woman* that came. And for her to say she was an engineer? The respect I felt in the room. Everyone paying attention and her commanding the room like

> that? I wanted to be her…. And she interacted with us in a way that was genuine. She was really herself.

Maya named her own experience with representation and connected it to how she thought representation mattered to kids in the KMC. In particular, she explained how representation was not about tokenism in identity, but about seeing an example of someone being their whole integrated self in their success. Marcel also shared that he saw his role as a Black male CI as sharing affirming representation to Black kids in the program. He said, "I share my experiences with students, like my college life—I tell them things about that and I think it's really inspiring for them… [to have] somebody that looks just like them that can relate to them."

Other participants shared how race consciousness functioned as part of affirmative caring in the program in being part of a more diverse community than they encountered in schools. For instance, when I asked Mahalia if she had any experiences in KMC "expressing any particular part of your identity in terms of gender, culture, or race," she said:

> I learned more about Bengalis and Mexicans… It's just so much stuff about cultures and race that you can learn...Because even though they're Mexican, or Bengali, it's not 'That's who they are.' Right? Don't matter… I care enough to learn about that culture. Does that make sense? Like, I feel like now people like, 'Oh, this stuff shouldn't matter. Like who you are, like what race you are.' It *matters*...Like, one of my students [has a disability]...It's not *who* she is, but it's a part of her. And we should validate that part of her but it's not who she is. I feel like that with anybody.

Mahalia's explanation of being conscious of others' identities speaks to how caring for someone requires recognizing dimensions of others' identities without essentializing them. Chandira also shared that, as a Bengali Muslim attending Renaissance High School, she felt that KMC offered

a community where she could be around both people who shared her identities and people who did not. She said:

> I'm the only Bengali here [her high school], whereas at my middle school, there were a handful of us. There were like five, six, in a classroom, it was a pretty good amount and [then] I didn't see them for an entire year. I don't wanna say it was a culture shock, 'cause it wasn't. It was just like, "No Bengalis. Okay, cool." You just go on with your day. But it is nice to see Bengalis again [at KMC] and say a joke in Bengali or something…. But I'm still connected with other [friends], you know what I mean? That way it's like a balance of both and I'm fine.

For Chandira, being involved in KMC allowed her to maintain connections with other Bengali youth that she does not get to see in school. Mahalia, who attended the same high school as Chandira, shared that she also experienced more diversity in KMC. She said:

> I go to school with mostly Black people. [In KMC] I learned more about Bengalis and Mexicans, because last year I was like, "this is the most racially diverse thing!" It was cool, because my student was Mexican, she tried to teach me Spanish...And it's just so much stuff about cultures and race that you can learn about too.

Mahalia shared that she had researched *hijab* more on her own because she wanted to understand more about her fellow KMC students' cultural and religious practices. So, for both Chandira and Mahalia, diversity in the KMC helped them build and maintain friendships across racial, ethnic, and religious differences. Their specific needs and positionalities were different, but both girls appraised KMC positively as a place less segregated than their school. That being said, their meaning-making was incidental to them—not an outcome of program discourses of care. Moreover, critical care praxis scholarship points us towards the importance of knowledge of

ourselves as racialized subjects who are positioned relative to others per systems of privilege and oppression (Wilson et al., 2013). Developing meaningful relationships between youth of color can potentially cultivate critical social capital, but only when those relationships are built with deliberate attention to varied and shared identities and positionalities.

## Possibilities for Healing and Exploitation in Vulnerability

Program discourses around vulnerability emphasized the stakes of deliberately engaging program participants' varied and shared identities and positionalities. Data show how practices encouraging public vulnerability—a type of emotional risk—were related to the program's normative framing of care as something communicated through affective affirmation and contradictory to conflict. In particular, all but one of the TAs and CIs I interviewed related that family debriefings—the meetings with all student-staff on Thursdays in which they shared highlights from the week—were testimony to the program's caring environment. However, my interview with Lowell, as well as my participant-observation of these debriefings and other meetings, surfaced deeper tensions around the program's encouragement of youths' deeply personal sharing.

### Thematic Vignette: Youths' Vulnerability as Confirmation of Care

Toward the end of the second summer of my study, I observed Owen address his peers, offering his words of gratitude and love that I quote in Chapter 1. While Owen spoke, he had to stop several times to let himself cry before he could continue talking. I watched as the 60-plus other youth in the room showed their support through their continued attentiveness, their "support" hand motions, and with some yells of "You got this, Owen!" A week after that observation, I was present when a Black TA named Kevin related a story about how he was inspired by his student Vanessa's bravery. Kevin started to share, saying:

I mean, this has been good, yeah this week was good. Vanessa, uh, I look up to her now. She was dealing with some bad stuff but today or yesterday—or no, two days ago she wasn't feeling that good, but now like it is mostly—it was a combination of (stutters and mumbles) the stuff that she was just going through and then to see her bounce back like that—(starts to cry and is unable to continue).

Others in the group started doing the "support" hand signal and someone said, "hey, Kevin, take your time!" Kevin eventually signaled that he wanted someone else to share, and after a bit he and Ms. Thompson went in the hallway to check-in. When they came back, Ms. Thompson started a joint share with Keith, as follows:

Ms. Thompson: Kevin and I are gonna tag team this particular highlight, if that's OK with you guys. (Murmurs of assent). So I'm gonna start: earlier this week, his student, Vanessa, during assembly, I don't know if you remember, but there was a Bridge student who stood up and had a quote about doing something out of your comfort zone. Do you remember who that was? (People respond that it was a girl named Mariah) Mariah. And so Vanessa, who is an eighth-grade student, took that to heart on this particular day, and got up and went up to the computer and put a song on the computer and it was K-pop. And so the team did not react positively to that. And so she was really, really, really down about it, and had a really hard time with it. So her and I talked quite extensively on [Monday]. And then throughout the day, I noticed Kevin come in to check on her...So that's the setup so you guys understand what the situation was. And then she came in on Tuesday,

and wasn't feeling well. She had a really hard time and was still feeling some type of way, and then—(motions to Keith).

Kevin: (Tries to speak, but starts getting emotional again and motions to Ms. Thompson to keep going)

Ms. Thompson: Okay, and then she (looking to Kevin, who is still emotional)—

Kevin: —she answered two questions and it put a smile on her face.

Ms. Thompson: She answered questions, and then what did she do?

Kevin: She did Tens and Stars—(again, louder) Tens and Stars.

Ms. Thompson: And that was what time?

Kevin: Today at assembly.

Ms. Thompson: Today at assembly, and that was the first time [she spoke at assembly]. And so that was very—

Kevin: —powerful.

Ms. Thompson then spoke directly to Kevin, in front of everyone, saying, "I just want to say that took a lot of courage....to [try sharing] for a second time and I'm super proud of you. Thank you so much for sharing." Several other youth called out, "Love you, Kevin!" Kevin said, "Love you, too" and smiled and looked down with a bashful expression before Ms. Thompson called on someone else to share.

**The Sociopolitics of Vulnerability**

"Family" debriefings on Thursdays often included youth being vulnerable about what they shared: publicly thanking friends, naming their personal challenges or struggles, and, in a meta sense, emotionally expressing their value for having space to be vulnerable with one another. Three of the four TAs and all of the adults I interviewed spoke to the power of TAs

sharing vulnerably in debriefings as well as other opportunities students took to express their emotional selves. At the end of my third interview with Maya, I asked if she wanted to share anything else. She said:

> I don't really have any like questions but I definitely have something that I wanted to share. I've always been a very emotional person, I've always been very different then a lot of the people I've hung around or been cool with. I've always been very different, and I never felt like who I was good enough. Or I never felt like who I was was good enough to help other people. And I didn't know, I used to fault myself for being so happy and so nice and so loving to other people because people you know, as you know, people throw stuff at you all day. All day long and every little thing hurt my feelings and I hated that about myself. I hated the fact that I cared about people and everything so much, I hated it, I promise you, I hated every aspect of it. But when I came here, my Bridge year, I learned to really release and be myself no matter where I go. To be yourself takes the most strength ever. And I could not have done it and I would not be myself if I didn't come here before I went into high school. And that's one of the most, you know, pivotal moments of your life, going into high school and experiencing a completely new lifestyle almost it feels like. (laughs). So, if I didn't have KMC or if I didn't know what it was or if my best friend ever dragged me here—'cause at first it was a drag. If nobody ever pushed me to come here, I definitely could not see myself being who I am, and I love who I am, and I respect who I am, and others respect who I am and I have to give KMC a lot of credit for that. So, yeah.

Maya spoke to how, for her, being vulnerable at KMC was related to having confidence as a high schooler. Marcel, too, made meaning about vulnerability at KMC in relation to his broader

educational experience. Toward the end of the same debriefing in which Kevin shared about his admiration of his student Vanessa, Marcel addressed the group:

> So the only thing I really want to say is pretty much about Kevin and Owen [who spoke and cried] last week. Thank you for reminding me that boys cry too. *Black* boys cry too. Because so many times I found myself trying to hide away my own feelings, my own expression. Just because I lack expression does not mean I lack emotion. So I feel everything honestly. And like I'm just so inspired by your vulnerability and just your courage to speak how you feel and let whatever play out the way that you do. (A few seconds pause.) I don't open up a lot. I'm kind of a brick wall sometimes. And I'm pretty sure nobody in this room knows this. But like since I was younger, I've been dealing with like, a few mental health things, like, I suffered from depression as well. My family, I have not spoken to them about this since I was 18. I've been seeking my own help. Like Math—I feel like KMC is like the best medicine. Somebody said last week that KMC is the best medicine. It's the best medicine. I can't say that I would have made it to this summer—made it through this summer—without KMC. So I just, I thank all y'all.

In his sharing, Marcel highlighted how expressing oneself requires navigating racialized and gendered expectations about emotions, vulnerabilities, and mental health. Specifically, he named the importance of Black boys being affirmed for sharing their feelings. He also named how being in a community that practiced such vulnerability influenced how he made sense of and coped with his own struggles. Marcel was the only person I observed who named the significance of expressing emotion in practicing healthy Black masculinity—but my field notes reflect several other instances across both summers of Black teenage boys sharing their joys and vulnerabilities in the TA debriefings. Watson et al. (2016) documented how facilitating vulnerable sharing

between Black male youth could contribute to "humanizing moments" in which the "young men shared details about their lives that made them feel both vulnerable and free" (p. 990).

Watson et al. (2016) also named that critical care praxis in community environments with youth and adults require that "the adults involved...are not simply making demands of the young people [but that] they reciprocate in a way that exposes their vulnerability and positions them as a learner alongside" youth (p. 986). In addition to those I interviewed, I documented hearing 15 other youth share an appreciation for the program practice of having Thursday family debriefings and being affirmed by one another in sharing their feelings and personal stories. At the same time, I noted that in my interview with Lowell, he spoke about the youths' sharing in a way that to me seemed exploitative, like he was assessing youths' vulnerability and trauma as proof of the program's goodness. I asked Lowell, "Can you describe a time you witnessed love in the KMC?" He responded:

> Sure. Every day. And it's expressed with hugs and smiles and people saying 'I love you,' so yeah—no, that's a ubiquitous experience. Now, you know, in our debriefings another really critical insider part of our culture is that the kids—because we believe in their greatness—they're encouraged to be themselves. You know, to not put on any airs. Don't pretend like—just, because you're expected to be yourself. So as a consequence of that, the students feel this is not only a safe place physically, but it's a safe place emotionally. So we've had our family debriefings—I'm sure you've got that somewhere (gesturing to my notebook)—where the kids will come up and share their most intimate thoughts in a room of 60-80 people and they realize that it will be received with the utmost care and respect. You know, we've had students get up and say, 'I'm a slasher. I slash my wrists. And this is the only place I feel safe.' We had a big, tall, kid stand up a couple years ago.

> Like 6'2". He said, 'You know what, I've been sexually abused my whole life,' and he can say that in front of all these people. And I've had students, you know ones I've known really well—I've known these particular students, they're like kids to me, stand up and say with tears running down their eyes, 'If it wasn't for KMC, I'd be dead." 'I mean it. Understand, I mean it. I'd be dead.' And so, that is not uncommon.

Lowell's perspective on the value of the kids' sharing of hurt and trauma aligned with the program's dominant messaging about care: care is individual and is offered in response to hurt or other perceived needs. While Marcel had offered an understanding of Black boys' vulnerability as a mode of rejecting racialized and gendered pressures, Lowell saw this vulnerability as evidence that care existed within the domain of the KMC.

Furthermore, program leadership encouraged youth to volunteer to attend early morning meetings on Thursdays with "visitors." Thursdays were the day when visitors were invited to observe the program. They often included educators, representatives from non-profit agencies, and potential donors to the program. I first learned of these early morning meetings in Thursday debriefings, when I observed a TA sharing admiration for what another TA shared in that morning's visitor meeting. Later in the first year of my study, I overhead another mention of a morning meeting. One TA spoke to the group and said, "I just want to shout out Mahalia, because a visitor was asking really defensive questions and she responded well with what I think we all wanted to say." After several other TAs had taken turns sharing their appreciations and highlights, Cohen addressed the youth:

> For your guys who weren't in the room this morning, Mahalia spoke with passion, emotion and power. There were poised, articulate, powerful people… There was a guy who—I think you know that Mr. Lowell is my hero and I follow his philosophy [of

> treating everyone with kindness]. This guy was asking really pointed questions and I followed Mr. Lowell's style and *assumed* that the guy wanted to help. Mahalia spoke up and said in a *kind* and respectful way that KMC has meant a lot to her...Sometimes it's not for everyone to understand. You still don't take away kindness.

I noted that, while the other TA had shared appreciation for Mahalia's response to the visitor, Cohen added another layer of explicitly praising the manner and tone of her delivery. When I interviewed Mahalia a couple of weeks later, I asked her about the interaction. I started by asking her about how she referred to the questioner as "kinda suburban." She confirmed that "suburban" meant the man was white. She also said she had some assumptions about him based on the way he engaged in that meeting:

> You going to a suburban school, you probably woulda been rich all your life, your parents probably put money away for you to go to college. Like, most of the kids in here [KMC], their parents like, "You have money for college?" No, they can't, 'cause they tryna eat! So you say you never heard of KMC? You probably never needed it. You live out in like, Suburban Hills, with a commission or something. And you never heard of it because you not open to it. Like, you can't say you never heard of something when you haven't been around people of color—people of color *in Detroit*.

She went on to describe the exchange more fully, saying:

> The guy was being a little bit rude, in the sense of, he was bombarding him—PC —with questions, like "How you gonna do this?" Like, "The percentages are not matching up with what you saying how you can do this. That doesn't make sense." Just like really being really negative about [the program]. And he was saying—he said something along the likes of "you're talking about the effect of one person," like "think about the bigger

picture here, that effect of one person." Like, what do you *mean*? Basically, for me, he was saying that doesn't really matter for the big picture, the effect on one person. So I was like (high-pitched voice, sucks teeth) "Oooooh!" I was sitting in the corner just like, building up my fire. And it wasn't like angry. I wasn't angry at him. I was just sad that he didn't understand, if that makes sense. And then I was sad that he couldn't *possibly* understand. He's like, "Oh, KMC been around for 20 years; I haven't never heard of it, so it must be not that important."

At this point, I believe I made a face. Mahalia responded to it and elaborated further:

*Yeah!* That's how we [the youth present] was like… "I haven't heard of *you* and I know you important!" But I didn't say that. I was *thinkin'* it. Oooh! (laughter) And he was just—it was just very rude what he said. He was like—he wasn't understanding....So after that, I raised my hand and I told him how it is. Yeah. I said, in our society, for DPS schools [goes on a relevant tangent]—I wasn't a [DPS student] for middle school, but my mom's a teacher, and she tells me all about the stuff. I go to her school sometimes. It is horrible, it's like disgusting. It's really, like—I can't, I can't—I'll be so upset to teach there, even live there. And all the teachers—how you gonna teach the teachers how to do that. The teachers *care*. I hate when people say the teachers are horrible. Some teachers *are* horrible. Some teachers care; they can't *do* it. It's like, you have to raise 40 kids who don't care about education 'cause their father, mother probably doing something horrible. It's like, the teachers *can* teach, they *do* care, you just need to give them the tools to care, to be able to. [returns to story] So, I said through DPS, throughout Detroit, for all Detroit kids, it's symbolizing like they're not important…. I just imagine, what if we actually had the materials? It's so crazy. And we are so smart. And if we actually had the materials

> and believed that we are smart? We could do so much more. So the schools say, everything around us say, "You're not worthy." For the Flint crisis? It's like, "Oh you're not worthy" for us to have clean water. It's little things that implanted in your head, like, "Oh, I don't need clean books, I don't need an education." It doesn't matter, 'cause I'm gonna end up—I don't need it, 'cause I'm gonna end up on the street," you know? It's like little things like that, I'm saying. But here at KMC? You are worthy, and you are worthy enough to do math. And it seems, like, stupid, like, "You're worthy enough to do *math*? Everyone can do math!" But people *don't* believe they can do math, because they believe the assumption that people tell them. Like they are going to be that certain way. Because what society put on them, they're going to be that certain way. They going to be a hood something, I don't know, and you can't be anything else, because no one else cares about you. But here, KMC? We do care about you. And it took me awhile, because like, last year I was a little upset, because the first week I was like, "You *care* about me? You don't know me!" But now I'm realizing they care about me because they care about everybody. They care about their kids the most, but they still care about a lot of people. And it's not like the caring of—it's like, you don't have to know someone to care about them. It took me a while to realize that. You don't have to know someone to care about them.

There is a lot to unpack in what Mahalia shared—including her direction of blame at individuals. In Chapter 6, I analyze more of Mahalia's response. Here, I want to highlight that she was dancing between a sociopolitical analysis and an individualistic analysis of how KMC as a program relates to education in Detroit, more broadly. Moreover, she was moving between these analyses in her recalling of how she engaged a white male visitor to the program who questioned

its value. Mahalia named (to me, at least) that she saw this man as someone who had been systemically cared for—unlike the systemic neglect and disposability youth of color in Detroit and Flint had experienced. There is a systemic analysis in her framing that speaks to how she was making meaning about KMC as a program: as a program redressing deficiencies or inadequacies in the existing education system, but also as a program explicitly communicating a competing story, about Detroit youth who were worthy of care and resources and education. There is much in Mahalia's story that is powerful and that challenges dominant sociopolitical arrangements. At the same time, she shared her thinking around these topics in a meeting with a white man, where she and her peers were put in a situation where they were expected to share personally almost as if to prove their humanity and worth. This example shows the high stakes sociopolitics of vulnerability, wherein vulnerability can be powerful and meaningful and *also* can be exploited.

## Conclusion

Overall, data show that KMC as a program asserted and reinforced conceptions of care that defined care as a set of responses to (perceived) individual needs (including material needs), as affective and emotive affirmation and acceptance, and as the exercise of individual morality. With this larger narrative of care, the program also framed care as an individual responsibility that the program was uniquely suited to facilitate, as mutually exclusive with violence or harm, and as something confirmed through individual vulnerability. Youth participants in KMC largely adopted the program's normative conceptions of care. For some youth, adopting these conceptions seemed to be related to how they were navigating the sociopolitics of educational resources, including their perceived needs for compensatory or supplementary education. Ultimately, youths' negotiations of their participation in KMC related to the program's

manipulative association of race-evasiveness and power-evasiveness with genuine care. As such, we can understand how youths' participation in KMC is informed by a politics of vulnerability that exploits youths' positionalities within systems of racism in education. These findings relate to scholarship demonstrating the general precarity and racialized harm that can flow from individual care practices in educational contexts, and particularly those between youth of color and white adults (Matias & Zembylas, 2016; Watson et al., 2016). These findings also relate to scholarship detailing the transformative potential of identifying youths' caring agencies and engaging those agencies in building knowledge about and practice with caring critically.

# Chapter V

## (Un)Reflected Caring Agencies

My findings about the interactions of care, race, and education in the program and in youths' broader meaning-making all stem from an understanding that, even outside of its classroom spaces, KMC is an instructional environment. In Chapters 2 and 4, I referenced Ball and Forzani's (2007) explanation that we can consider the instructional dynamic—including interactions between environment, teachers, students, and content—as a framework or "metaphor for interactions that take place in many other settings" (p. 530). In Chapter 4, in particular, I attended to how a community-based education program is its own instructional environment. Despite the program being billed as a mathematics education program, participants often identified the culture, relationships, and activities of the program as being indicative of care. At the program level, these elements did operate as content in some ways. Still, as Baldridge et al. (2017) demonstrated in their review of literature about CBEs, outside-of-school programs have the potential to support students in "bridg[ing] their lived reality and identity development with the academic standards deemed important" in schools (p. 389). Without naming students' lived reality and identity development, KMC leaders did tell me that they pride the program's positive effect on youths' ACT scores and high school graduation rates and consider that influence to be beneficial to the youth.

Scholars of critical care praxis in education have highlighted how politics of academic success and achievement are embroiled with racial ideologies and resultant discourses around

academic expectations and supports (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Critical care praxis requires developing and practicing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies and establishing systems of peer and community engagement and support (DeNicolo, et al., 2017; Wilson, 2015). Relatedly, critical mathematics education scholars have highlighted how mathematics discourses and instructional dynamics promote white supremacy and anti-Blackness in ways that materially harm Black youth, as well as Latinx youth and Muslim youth who are racialized as brown or non-white (Battey & Leyva, 2016; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). Given these circumstances, it is just as important to consider how KMC's normative instructional practices and contexts in mathematics classes also demonstrate the sociopolitical interactivity of care, race, and education.

Drawing on participant-observation data that I have triangulated with participant interviews, I share findings related to my second research question: *How do KMC participants' conceptions of care relate to normative instructional practices and dynamics in the program, particularly those related to mathematics?* As described in Chapter 3, I focused my classroom-specific instructional observations on four instructors: Mr. James, Dr. Jordan, Mr. Lowell, and Ms. Bianchi. In each of the participant-observation periods, I documented periods of instructional interaction in detail in ways that allowed me, to some extent, to gain insight into the discretionary spaces—each of which is an opportunity for teachers to exercise professional autonomy in ways that can either reinforce or disrupt patterns of oppression and domination (Ball, 2017). I also conducted some instructional observations in classes led by other instructors, although with less regularity. So, I share related data from these other instructional contexts when it provides either significant illustration or attenuation to the findings derived from my primary instructional data.

**Patterns in Pedagogies: Teacher-Directed Instruction as a Form of Needs Provision**

The overwhelming majority of classroom instruction that I observed was teacher-directed. Out of the 16 hours of instruction I observed, I documented two instances of student-responsive and/or student-directed instruction. I also documented three lessons that were partially project-based, but still heavily guided by the teacher. In short, the normative structure of lessons in KMC during my observations was decidedly one in which the teacher presented information and guided dialogue around the day's work. In Chapter 4, I shared findings about KMC's conception of care operating at an individual level in response to another's perceived needs. This perspective was connected to a fundamental paradigm framing care as compensation for individual harms or deficiencies.

With regard to instruction, however, I observed normative teacher-directed pedagogies in the program relating to programmatic notions of care as a way to address youths' deficiencies—and particularly perceived deficiencies in their learning. The few times I heard adults in the program explicitly critique school mathematics, their focus was on the *how* of the kids learning—not on the systemic causes that contribute to Detroit youth of color being marginalized from mathematics. For instance, KMC worked with a local high school to provide and facilitate a two-week mathematics camp before the school year began. Cohen, reporting to the senior staff on what he saw in his visit, sang praises about the kids' support for one another and their courage in participating. He affirmed the individual care that they practiced with one another. He also said, "Our school system has allowed at least 30 kids to enter the 9th grade needing to learn whole numbers and how to count." Similarly, in an interview, Jamal—an instructor in the mathematics department at Wayne State—shared that he encountered many students entering his classes who "can't add fractions" or do not know how to perform operations with negative

numbers and that KMC was related to preventing that kind of later gap. There is a distinction between explicitly blaming the kids and attributing blame to the school system—but fundamentally, Cohen and Jamal both demonstrated how adults in KMC participated in discourses that frame inequity as something that can be resolved by merely teaching existing mathematics better. In contrast, critical scholars have repeatedly pointed to the necessity of questioning and re-imagining how mathematics itself is socio-politically constructed, including in quotidian classroom interactions (see Gholson & Martin, 2012; Hottinger, 2016).

In instructional situations, this logic of care translated into constraining student exploration and opportunities for dialogue. Mr. James, Mr. Lowell, and Ms. Bianchi regularly had a low proportion of student talk in their classrooms. Among them, Mr. James still had the highest proportion, but often bypassed opportunities to open the structure and approach of the lesson to students' sense making. For instance, one day I observed the following instructional exchange take place in one of Mr. James' seventh-grade classes:

Mr. James: I want you to represent fifteen-thirds with number bars and then write what it is as a mixed number. Alright, can I get a volunteer to come up to the board and show us what you did with fifteen thirds? Uhhh, I'm gonna go with Kiah. Okay. I got your number bars here (gestures to blank rectangles sketched on the chalkboard).

Kiah: (Whispers something to Mr. James)

Mr. James: Oh, I'm sorry! Fifteen *fifths* [not thirds]. OK, now talk to us about what you did. Step to here so they might hear you better.

Totti (CI): Show support! (to everyone; more than half of the students start doing the support motion)

Kiah: (Sketching and shading as she goes). You draw three bars, and then you divide the bars into five parts, and then you shade. Fifteen-fifths is you shade all of it. And it's two and five-fifths.

Mr. James: Yep. And actually—very good, Kiah. And actually, Kiah, we didn't even need to do two and five-fifths. We coulda just gone straight to three. This is equal to three whole bars. So if it's equal to a whole number, don't even worry about writing as a mixed number, because it's equal to a whole number. You all got that?

In this example, there are several points at which Mr. James directs the mathematical dialogue—including foreclosing opportunities for dialogue. Without doing a full micro-analysis of classroom instruction (which extends beyond the limits of my data and the bounds of my study), we can understand that these moments are smaller instantiations of a generally teacher-driven lesson. For instance, Mr. James could have involved other students in mathematical dialogue in the moments when he himself evaluated Kiah's answer or told her to write whole number answers a particular way (despite his earlier specification of writing the answer as a mixed number—which may well be involved in Kiah's reasoning!). He also could have interpreted Kiah's answer in ways aligned with deficit-based perspectives of Black girls' mathematical abilities and responded in a more explicitly denigrating way (e.g., "Ok, does anyone *else* want to tell us the answer?). There are many reasons why Mr. James may have made the instructional choices he did in this particular example. Notably, though, this example is representative of a common pedagogical dynamic in which KMC instructors—even when involving students in dialogue and inviting them to the board—prioritized delivering a particular lesson objective over

more open dialogue. In another instance, Ms. Bianchi responded to a student's follow-up question about an example by lamenting, "We have *so* much to get through."

In addition to the relationships between care as a form of redressing individual needs and teacher-driven pedagogies, KMC's discourse of individualistic care also fed a dynamic where youth who challenged some of the normative pedagogies were considered *not* caring. For instance, when I asked Owen if he could describe a time when he did something that was considered a "mistake" by others in the program, he said:

> One time, we were at the big family debriefing. I was just talking about something that happened—I was talking about how the Sevens (seventh-graders) kept saying they didn't like a certain class, but when they were in the class they weren't very engaged and stuff. And I said that the kids said the class was boring. And then, I just felt bad. I don't know, I just felt bad, and then the next day, one of the instructors—Mr. James—he said like "You should probably, probably shouldn't say stuff like that in, in uh, family debriefing, that's where positive stuff is supposed to be said," and I felt really bad about it, but I was, able to apologize to the teacher, and um, he did accept my apology.

Owen was referring to the Calculus discovery class and, when he shared the kids' frustration with the class, another instructor—a Black man and longtime program alum—encouraged him to apologize to Lowell for sharing something that was not affirming of Lowell's teaching. Raven described feeling bored in the Calculus discovery class, too—but shared that she learned that expressing her feelings about the class's structure was related to her not considering others' mathematical needs. She explained:

> Like, compromise what you wanna do. Compromising is a big thing here. Like, if we go to Ms. Thompson, PC, or Mr. Lowell and say, "Hey, we don't like this!" they'll try to

> change it but it's not as much. So like our Calculus class is preeeettty boring. So they'll try to change it a little bit, but not always, 'cause then it's gonna throw off the lesson, and some people don't understand as quick as others.

Raven identified that the adults in the program were open to hearing her feedback about the Calculus class. However, her anecdote also reflects program leadership's resistance to change in pedagogy. Notably, both Owen and Raven recounted instances in which students had identified and shared their perspectives—and in which they received responses suggesting that their perspectives were inconsiderate of others' needs. Owen and Raven both shared that these experiences were educative for them, including in learning how to communicate care reciprocally with adults. Without evaluating the particularities of these exchanges in KMC, a relevant and dangerous pattern does exist more generally, in which white teachers respond to critiques, conflict, or even perceived disinterest from students of color with inappropriate emotionality (Matias, 2016). This same dynamic can translate to teachers perceiving behaviors—even physical postures—through a racialized lens, assessing a student of color's "care" for the subject, the class, and/or the teacher themself (Valenzuela, 1999). Crucially, while Raven's and Owen's stories do *not* evidence this pattern, they also do not showcase the kind of knowledge and actions that would be aligned with critical care praxis, including seeing conflict or disagreement as a potential outgrowth of care, rather than focusing on hurt feelings as evidence of uncaring actions (Matias, 2016).

**Patterns in Content: Reinforcing Norms of Whiteness in Mathematics**

Reinforcing the association of mathematics with property, the program's curriculum operated from the assumption that mathematics, as a field, is unproblematic (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Instead, their perspective was that mathematics needs to be taught differently, including

both pedagogies for teaching *and* content for teaching. This perspective was demonstrated by my frequent observation of KMC teachers and senior staff members' discussing how their "revolutionary curriculum" could transform education. While it was not a part of my study or my access permissions to review the curriculum itself, interviewees explained to me that the core of the curriculum is teaching foundational mathematics in ways that scaffold more clearly into higher-level mathematics. For example, KMC alum and ninth-grade supervisor Jamal Ocasio explained:

> ...the way KMC presents [math], nothing feels new, everything's a tie in. Like, I know when I explain it to the students, too, a lot of times they get upset, like 'Why do I have to show all this work? Why can't I just do this shortcut? This [the shortcut] is the way we do it in school.' And it's like, 'Because when I present to you like ninth- and tenth-grade material, it should look like seventh-grade material—just looking slightly different, with letters instead of numbers, but everything leads into the next.

Alyssa Brown, the seventh-grade supervisor in the summer of 2019, worked as a high school mathematics teacher during the school year. She shared that she got her teaching certification for grades six-12, but pursued her master's degree in elementary mathematics education because she felt that, "It was important as a high school educator to know the full gamut of where kids had to go, so as I'm trying to fill some of those learning gaps, I know what it is on a deeper level." Her work in KMC, she said, was to help students learn and develop strong mathematical foundations that could facilitate their learning at all levels.

I do not have the data to speak to individual teachers' subjectivities in teaching the KMC mathematics curriculum. Hypothetically, Brown's focus on foundational concepts could be related to her positioned understanding as a Black woman teacher in Detroit about what the

youth of color in KMC need to navigate dominant high school math. With KMC as the unit of analysis, I find that the program, as a whole, maintained a focus on foundational mathematics in a way that forefronted the program staff's understanding of student needs (i.e., remediation). Furthermore, I observed that the program's particular discourses of foundational and conceptual mathematics used rhetorics of high expectations but, in instruction, advanced paternalistic and deficit-based assumptions about students' mathematical abilities. These patterns reflected a sort of movement between Martin's (2007) description of two common tropes in white teachers' orientation toward Black mathematics learners: the missionary (communicating paternalistic care and low expectations) and the cannibal (ignoring the student's personhood and focusing very explicitly on content).

Of the classroom and teacher contexts I focused my closer instructional observations on, I documented that the content of all of the "foundational" courses did not include any particular attention to re-shaping mathematics itself to support socially just practices. As I describe later, while there was some data on how the program encouraged certain forms of interpersonal interactions, this encouragement did not address how mathematics content itself was implicated in those interactions. In the "conceptual" courses, I observed that the content was largely composed of the dominant mathematics canon. For example, I documented conceptual classes focused on classic problems like the Knights and Knaves logic problem, the Konigsberg Bridge graph theory problem, and the Towers of Hanoi puzzle. Moreover, I observed that the pedagogies and tasks associated with these more-conceptual topics were still typically teacher-directed and rote in nature.

One of the common discourses about mathematics content in KMC ("the KMC way") was about not using language around "canceling" to talk about simplifying expressions (e.g., in

the fractional expression $\frac{4x3y}{2x}$, some people might say that you could simplify the expression by "cancelling" out the $2x$ in the denominator and a factor of $2x$ from the numerator ($2x \times 2 = 4x$). Instead, KMC taught that students should identify and factor out ones in expressions (e.g., $\frac{(2x)(2)(3y)}{2x} = \frac{(2x)(2)(3y)}{2x} = \frac{1}{1} \cdot \frac{(2)(3y)}{2x}$ ). While this discourse could potentially invite students into conceptual thinking about how and why simplification procedures work, I observed that this idea became procedural in classroom instruction. For instance, I observed the following exchange in Lowell's eighth-grade class (Operations with the Real Numbers):

| | |
|---|---|
| Lowell: | Alright, guys, moving along, singing a song. Pick up your pencils! If you see the word "of"—who can tell us, by the way, if you see that work "of" in a word problem, what do we do. Wes, what do we do? Add, subtract, divide, multiply? (Prolonged silence) OK, Wes, you have a choice: add, subtract, divide or multiple? Take a shot, you got support. (Student expresses that he is thinking but that he is very unsure). Just take a guess, what's your— |
| Wes: | I don't know, division? |
| Lowell: | You're close, you're close. You're close. It's not division but is what, everybody? |
| Multiple students: | Multiplication. |
| Lowell: | That's it, multiplication. You see oh, these multiple. OK, cool beans. So, (writing on board as he speaks), "Of means multiplication." Can I have my two esteemed CIs read this one time. CIs, take it away. |
| Two female CIs: | (flat tone) Of means multiplication. |

Lowell: OK, so if I take three-fourths of 12, of means multiplication. So I can say, 'Cool beans! Three-fourths *times* 12." That's it, guys! That's it. Piece of cake, upside down. So, moving along, singing a song, I'll just write this as a fraction. And since I can multiply anything by anything, I am on a roll. Now, Star Question, gang. At this juncture, gang, what is the key? What's the key question you wanna ask right now? El Stupido says multiply 3 times 12 over 4 times 1. What's the one question we wanna ask? (Silence). Bad question!... (To one CI, specifically) How about you go?

CI: You want me to pick someone?

Lowell: How about you just tell 'em how to write it.

CI: Twelve equals four times three.

Lowell: OK, so I see that four times three times three. Okie dokie, Mr. Pokey, do it the long way. What's the unnecessary one, Mike? (Pause. Student says something inaudible.) OK, three over three, what is that everybody? ONE.

In this exchange, the teacher denigrates people using mainstream simplification procedures using a raciolinguistic frame loaded with deficit-based, Nativist connotations about the intelligence of Spanish-speakers (Rosa & Flores, 2017). The teacher also tells students to use the "hidden one" procedure without involving their active sensemaking about it, a choice relevant to systemic anti-Blackness that informs patterns of teachers not engaging students of color in substantive mathematics (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017).

**Patterns in Tasks & Assessments: Complicating and Reifying Mathematics as Property**

While I observed that all KMC classes involved high proportions of teacher-facilitated dialogue, there was much more variation in the normativity of group work and board work in teachers' classes. In Dr. Jordan's and Mr. James's classrooms, in particular, pair and group work was much more common than in Ms. Bianchi's classes or Mr. Lowell's classes. Specifically, I observed Dr. Jordan and Mr. James each using group work as a central part of classroom activities in about two-thirds and one-half of the lessons I was present for, respectively. However, most common across KMC classrooms were discourses and arrangements around mathematical tasks and assessments that reified the idea of mathematics as a gatekeeping subject (Battey & Leyva, 2016).

Part of the way that KMC advanced the idea of mathematics as a gatekeeping subject was by relying on tasks and assessments that communicated deficit-frames and/or low expectations of youth. For instance, I observed that teachers very commonly invited youth to participate through rote learning methods, like choral recitation and rote memorization. These task patterns were especially evident in the seventh-grade discovery math classes. Over the duration of my study, I observed the students in these classes being taught Calculus proof for the partial sums of infinite series. Most days in the class involved repeated individual and choral recitations of various parts of the proof. In one-on-one conversations I had with seventh-graders, a few students communicated their active sense-making about the proof (e.g. "because you add all the fractions forever and ever and ever")—but many more relied on recitation. The teacher of the class, Bob Lowell, told me after class that, "They're not gonna remember this proof in two years, but if I've done my job right, they will learn to be interested in math." He suggested that he did not see the youth as conceptually learning mathematics, which aligned with his reliance on rote

memorization and repetition. It seemed to me that, even while expressing boredom or disengagement with these learning methods, some youth felt good about their proximity to advanced mathematics in terms of the status it conferred. For instance, Carlotta said that when she returned to school after her first year in KMC, her teacher and peers would ask her "How do you know Calculus and you're only going to seventh grade?" In some ways, then, the program's emphasis on rote memorization in "advanced" classes positioned youth of color as having lower mathematical ability *and* reinforced a white supremacist sociopolitical valuation of mathematics—both aspects of larger operations of racism, Eurocentrism, and patriarchy in mathematics (Hottinger, 2016; Stinson, 2017).

However, other teachers in KMC did make room in their classes to attenuate discourses of mathematics as property. Dr. Jordan often did so by adapting content to respond to students' topical engagement. For instance, before her Proof class one day, I observed students having a lively debate about whether or not you should pour cereal before milk or vice versa. During class, when reviewing proof by contradiction, I noted that some of these same students tried to use the milk/cereal context to give examples of proof by contradiction. Dr. Jordan gamely participated and had students come to the board to attempt a proof by contradiction for her position on the topic. At the end of the class, Jordan agreed to share with the class a particular proof she had referenced earlier. She said, "This is what be known as the datin' proof," and explained that when she attended the historically-Black college at which she is now faculty, her friend finally agreed to date someone after he did this proof. The students laughed, but some students also mentioned feeling inspired by what Jordan shared about the college and, as one of the students put it, "all the Einsteins there." These were examples of Jordan making tasks and activities responsive to students' expressed interests and engagement.

Relatedly, even while perhaps advancing tasks that may seem procedurally-oriented, Dr. Jordan often communicated that teaching choices were designed to prepare students for college mathematics. A Black woman mathematics professor at a Black women's college, Jordan would often drop phrases like "When you get to college" or "my college students had a lot of fun with this activity." With mathematics tasks, in particular, I noted several occasions when she linked procedural steps to students' long-term mathematics learning. For instance, during one class focused on multiplying and dividing polynomials, I observed the following interaction:

Equation on board: $\frac{7x+1}{8} \times \frac{2}{(7x+1)(7x-1)} = \frac{1}{4(7x-1)}$

Student: Is it necessary to re-write the terms so they're right over each other? (Referencing how to show simplification by grouping expressions and terms from the numerators and the denominators to visually show that they divide to equal one)

Dr. Jordan: Yes, it is necessary. Once you guys graduate from college, you will thank me.

Importantly, as a Black woman from Detroit who had received a master's degree in mathematics and a Ph.D. in education, Dr. Jordan sometimes situated her teaching of procedural tasks in her positioned understanding. She also communicated a high expectation and estimation of students by communicating her assumption that they would go to college ("once you graduate," rather than a conditional "if you graduate.") Still, even while there were some important indications of varied classroom activities, I observed that KMC instruction most typically included normative tasks that centered procedural knowledge and performative student engagement.

The program's normative teaching activities related to its reliance on tests and quizzes for assessments. A little over one half of the youth I interviewed described test scores as evidence of

their learning. Youths' notions of mathematical achievement both inside and outside of KMC were informed by their testing experiences. Many of the youth I interviewed expressed that they valued having support with foundational mathematics, even if they had technically covered the topics in school already. Zacarias explained that in school "I was doing not so good at math. And then I came here and it improved me a lot in math, so that set my goal to keep getting higher (floats voice upward), higher, higher in math." Hailey also said that "one thing that's fun about KMC is that every student gets to experience the things they need to clarify in school to go to the next grade." I also heard TAs in an SAT preparatory class express their relief that they were getting support to be successful on the test. In some ways, youth understood the program's focus on foundational mathematics as redressing students' needs.

Like Zacarias alluded to when he said he "was doing not so good at math" in school, many of the youth I interviewed and observed referred to ways that they had internalized their difficulties in school mathematics as reflective of their intelligence. Coming into KMC, some of these youth had internalized deficit assumptions about their mathematical ability. For instance, Raven said:

> [W]hen I was little, I had a teacher, and she told me that I would never be nothin' and there was no point in me trying to do anything. So I just felt like—I didn't feel like anything no more. So when I saw that I failed my pre-test [in KMC] I was like, 'Mommy, I don't want to do it no more.'... So when I found out that I was progressing [on the tests], I felt really happy about myself, because I felt like I was proving all my haters wrong.

Raven's experience highlights an intrinsic tension in affirming a student's ability with improved test scores: the student may feel good about their improvement, but it can also reinforce

problematic patterns of standardized achievement norms and high-stakes assessment as means for evaluating youths' learning and abilities (Tanner, 2013).

Relatedly, I noted that many kids would express apprehension about the tests. The program made some efforts to communicate that the tests were not high stakes. For example, I frequently observed the TAs, CIs, and senior staff describing the tests to students as "information." The program also had a policy where TAs and their students were responsible for deciding when a student might be ready to take or retake a summative quiz. I noted that some TAs and students did these quizzes often, using them to determine which concepts to focus working together on. However, I also noted that some TAs shared that they were more reserved in using the tests, especially if they felt like their student would be discouraged by a low score. Unstated by participants, but part of a larger and unavoidably relevant sociopolitical context, are patterns of mathematics achievement being associated with whiteness and math assessments serving as high stakes gatekeepers for kids' broader academic access and achievement (Bullock & Meiners, 2019).

Despite muddying some discourses of high stakes testing, the program's approach to practicing care through individual affirmation seemed to contribute to TAs reporting their students' achievement on tests as evidence of students' success in the program. More often, they shared their excitement about the student gaining confidence or participating or helping someone else in the class—but testing was a recurrent theme in TA discussions of supporting their students. Much rarer in the data were notions of testing that aligned with Carlotta's explanation to me that, unlike school where grades were evaluated as "high" and "low," in KMC, "Everybody did good on their test, 'cause you tried your best!" While Carlotta's explanation provides a nice contrast to the dominance of high-stakes testing, it also signals that practicing

care through individual affirmation may also relate to students' low expectations of themselves or others.

**Patterns in Interactions: Invoking & Navigating Systemic Racism**

In Chapter 4, I shared that KMC's conception of care as affirmative acceptance fueled a dynamic in which accepting Lowell's racist "humor" was an act of individual caring. This deeply problematic dynamic also translated into the mathematics classrooms. In a seventh-grade class, Lowell called on a Black student by referring to him by the moniker of a cartoon monkey with whom the student shared a first name. Another time, Lowell called on a Black girl named Kenya[12] by saying, "I'm going to call on not Somalia, not Tanzania, but Kenya!" In that same class period, after mispronouncing another Black girl's name and apologizing twice, Lowell mispronounced it again and then said in a dismissive tone with a flip of his hand, "Oh, whatever." One day, I observed Lowell's Foundations of Advanced Mathematics course. Some TAs in a second KMC site across campus were enrolled in the course, which began each day right after lunch. When class started, a couple of these students were not there, and Lowell commented to the class that the kids who were late were "delinquents." When the students, two Black TAs, came into the class Mr. Lowell, said, "You delinquents! Do your best to get here on time." In my field notes, I noted that Lowell's tone made it seem like he was genuinely frustrated by their tardiness and was thinly veiling his real frustration with "joking" language. Invoking language of criminality for the students' tardiness called upon systemic issues of white policing and criminalizing of Black youth. In my interactions with and observations of Lowell throughout the time of my study, it was clear that Lowell did not consciously think of his behaviors as

[12] Kenya is a pseudonym, and Somalia and Tanzania are used as substitutions that mimic the geographical construct Lowell took by naming two countries adjacent to the country with which the student shared a name and that were less common African-American naming traditions.

racist—but they clearly invoked patterns of racist oppression and white supremacy. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4, the program simultaneously sanctioned "comedy" as a mode of care and discouraged conflict by equating care with niceness and affirmation of others. While Lowell's behavior was explicitly racist, the program as a whole encouraged a lack of critical engagement with issues of race as part of its caring paradigm. This paradigm contributed to teachers *not* engaging sociopolitical context, including issues of race, in ways that perpetuated norms of whiteness in mathematics.

Cohen rarely talked about mathematics in the program. Instead, he often used the morning assemblies as spaces to share stories and expound on the importance of practicing courage, compassion, and love. However, there was one significant incident in a morning assembly when he demonstrated how the program's messaging around individual caring responsibilities were related to deficit frames of youth *and* elitist notions of mathematics. In the context of imploring the youth in the auditorium to stay away from horseplay and violence (as discussed in Chapter 4), he said "Be brilliant. This is a math program, after all." He then went on to tell the kids that brilliance is indicated by self-control and rationality, saying "Nothing can make you angry unless you decide to let it." He associated care with individual morality and responsibility (including abstention from irrational conflict and violence) and indicated that these individual behaviors were associated with mathematical brilliance. The rhetoric of this framing invoked racialized discourses about grit and perseverance that are common in deficit-based mathematics education. For instance, in a review of empirical studies about Black mathematics learners, Ridgeway and McGee (2018) found that mathematics education researchers often rely on dominant paradigms to frame the problem spaces and possible implications of their studies. Dominant premises in such research included a reliance on Black students' mathematical

achievement scores on standardized tests, without considering systemic inequities (such as patterns of funding disparities) and assumptions that Black students' families and communities were inherently culturally deficient in mathematical thinking and practice, rather than considering how general conceptions of "mathematical thinking and practice" has reified white, patriarchal, and Western conceptions of mathematics (Gutierrez, 2013; Ridgeway & McGee, 2018).

Furthermore, the program's emphasis on individual care contributed to emphasizing obedience and compliance. When students behaved outside the relational expectations, this logic framed their behavior as uncaring. Mahalia explained to me that she and her peers in the program felt compelled to "behave" in order to reciprocate the care that they perceived Lowell had for them. She said:

> Teachers are human. They're very human. They get angry. They get upset. But when they get angry and upset, they just...calm down and come back to the situation. Like, 'Guys, you weren't the best.' And they care about us so much. We don't want to disappoint them. They have a better relationship. Like, you want to make them happy. Like Mr. Lowell—I have FOAM [Foundations of Advanced Mathematics]. Crazy class. Intense. And sometimes we're not on our best, like doing our own stuff. We're just doing our own things. He's like 'Oh, guys, you weren't really [on it today].' He gets a little upset, 'cause he loves teaching so much—and *we* get upset [at ourselves] and the next day, [we] just do better.

Conversely, I documented hearing a few teachers—but primarily Lowell—using the language of "greatness" as a proxy for obedience. In one class period I observed, the class seemed bored by the repetitive choral recitation of the Calculus proof. Lowell said, "You all have greatness and

today you haven't shown it. I know you guys are actually smart enough that you can do Calc 2." Lowell explained to me that his understanding of greatness means:

> When the kids backslide, it's not like 'Hey, you know, this is something terrible.' No, this is all a part of the process. So, for example, if somebody is goofing around in my classroom...you want to do things as quickly and as stealthily as you can to tune the kid up in the most efficient way. I can simply say, 'Deon, we need you to show your greatness.' And they understand what that means...The responsibility for all of us to try to show each other our greatness as much as we can.

Raven reported being on the student side of this pattern, explaining that one day when she and her classmates "were slacking in Mr. Lowell's and everybody was falling asleep" he said to them, "'Come on y'all. Y'all can do better. I have seen more greatness.'" Raven explained that "ever since then we just been trying to focus more and trying to push through, even though we're tired." Lowell used the term "greatness"—a word that students often used to describe someone's unique brilliance—as a way of associating his expectations for compliance and behavioral comportment with students' overall goodness (including their practice of care).

Despite the many ways that caring discourses aligned with dominant instructional dynamics, many youth said that learning math in KMC was fun in ways that encouraged their interest in math. Basirah explained that "It's really fun and really enjoyable—like, you're learning and having fun at the same time." Zacarias echoed this same sentiment, telling me that "it's a fun way to learn math!" When I asked him to explain more, he said:

> The teachers find the fun way to teach you the real numbers. Like, so in fractions—the decimal points. It's like tenths, hundredths, thousandths. And Mr. James taught us a little rap, like (rapping) "Tenths, hundredths, thousandths, *yeah*, ten thousandths, hundred

> thousandths, millionths, *yeah*" and it kept going. So it was pretty fun. And then, they let us teach and explain. It's not just taking notes and sitting there and letting the teacher teach you. Like you can actually teach and involve the class.

In my participant-observation, I noticed that Mr. James, a Black male mathematics teacher from Detroit public schools and a KMC alum, and Dr. Jordan, a Black woman KMC alum who teaches mathematics at a prominent historically-Black college, both often encouraged students to have fun with the material in ways that allowed them to take some ownership of it. James often did so by flipping the classroom after his initial explanation, and having students teach each other. He also created mathematical stories in his teaching. For example, he enacted a theatrical demonstration explaining why calling fractions greater than one "improper fractions" was incorrect. In his demonstration, James said

> I tend to get a little emotional (sniff). Everybody has a name, and everybody likes to be called by their name. These numbers? They have a name (sucks in breath)—but people don't call them by their right name! They call them (sniff, exhalation of disbelief), 'improper fractions.' But there's nothing—*nothing*—improper about these fractions! They're real name is 'fractions greater than one.'

I noted that students were smiling, laughing, and engaging with one another about the comedic performance. One student said loudly, "Put some respect on their name!" and James said, "That's right!" Part of having fun included code-switching language.

Many times, instructional interactions promoted emphasis on trying. For example, a seventh-grader named Abdul, who typically did not volunteer, raised his hand one day when Mr. James asked if anyone who had not already contributed would like to try the next problem. As Abdul made his way to the front, his CI cheered for ("Go Abdul!") and James exclaimed, "That's

what I'm talking about! *This* is what I *love* to see: people taking risks!" Paris and Alim (2014) make clear that using and affirming genuine (non-appropriative) modes of cultural expression in classrooms is key to creating a culturally sustaining environment. Dr. Jordan and Mr. James both engaged in some signifying behaviors that unsettled the normativity of white cultural expression in the classroom. Importantly, though, their cultural responsiveness was more limited to relational interactions around normative content and did not extend to transformative interpretations and uses of mathematics content. So, while incorporating cultural responsiveness in relational interactions can be powerful and meaningful, it is distinct from instruction that leverages critical care praxis vis-à-vis content. For instance, Gholson's curriculum (Mathematics for Justice, Identity, and meta-Cognition, or MaJIC) included content about mathematics as a tool for social change, content about personal identities and (racialized) societal scripts related to mathematics, and content about developing and practicing skills that can support mathematical thinking (Gholson & Robinson, 2019). Other researchers have highlighted efforts that extend into involving students in praxis, such as Gutstein's (2006) work about "mathematics for social justice" (p. 21). Transforming instructional content with an eye toward transforming the world—and involving students in that work—is aligned with critical care praxis' attention to students' participation in justice work (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2005).

**Youths' Interpretations & Mediations in Normative KMC Instructional Contexts**

Across my interview and participant-observation data, I found that despite the program's race-evasiveness, the youth still engaged their own meaning-making about sociopolitical issues related to their participation in the program—including race and mathematics education. Because the program's power- and systems-evasive conception of care precluded any centrally organized or collectively-developed engagement with justice-based mathematics instruction, youths'

thinking about race in the program often went unchallenged in its echoing of dominant racial discourses related to education and math (Martin, 2013). For instance, Marisha shared that she made meaning about her involvement in the program as a Black girl in relation to her perceptions of Bengali students in the program. Marisha explained:

> I know it's a lot of your Bengali—those type of kids, which, for the career I wanna go in, you're gonna see a majority of those kids succeeding, so I have to be the one that stands out. As far as being a doctor, you see a lot of those types of races. You see a lot of those in your doctor offices. So here, I see a lot of those are typically, really smart… I didn't wanna categorize it like that. But being here now, being around them, it's very true. It's pretty accurate.

When I asked Marisha what her perception meant for her, she said, "that just means that I just have to show off more. Like, not trying to be, like, competition, but I just need to—I know what I need to come here and do." Significantly, Marisha's perception of racial stereotypes inside of KMC is connected to her experiences of racialized pressures in the broader world. However, this incident also reveals how the program's theory of care leads to a *lack* of instructional opportunities to challenge problematic stereotypes or assumptions. In other words, Marisha's interpretation of her own position and Bengali students' positions on the racial hierarchy of mathematical ability was part of her interactivity in instruction that remained unacknowledged by her teachers (Martin, 2009b).

I observed another example showing how students' engagement with their own and others' racial and ethnic identities was more incidental than professionally planned for. In one of Dr. Jordan's classes, I witnessed a Latinx teenage boy ask a Bengali Muslim boy if fasting for Ramadan was challenging. The Bengali student said that it depended, but that "Ramadan

happens during the summer sometimes. You should do it with me next time!" Another Latinx student said, "Mexicans do *not* fast. We like food too much!" After laughing, though, the boy who first asked the question excitedly proclaimed that he would fast in solidarity so that he could learn more about what it was like—an offer that signaled culturally-responsive care, just as the second boy's invitation to join him in fasting did. This example shows that youth are engaging in the sociopolitics of race as it shows up at the individual level, regardless of the program's aversion to the social identity dimensions of care. In terms of the instructional dynamic, youth interacted and interpreted each other using their existing cultural knowledge and responsiveness. Hypothetically, the teacher could use youths' cultural knowledge and responsiveness as "resources" that extend into interactions around mathematics content (Ball, 2017; Herbst, 2006). I did not conduct such a micro-level observation that I can provide data about the exact frequency or consistency with which program instructors did or did not address sociopolitical—including racial—dimensions of classroom interactions. However, across my classroom-focused observational data (the 16 hours of observation I conducted in four teachers' classes), I found that teachers generally avoided engaging the sociopolitics of race. Instead, as previously discussed, teachers generally upheld the program's norms about showing care by accepting and affirming individual self-expression and culture in ways that avoided conflict and recognition of systems of power.

In addition to bringing some generally unrecognized interpretations of the sociopolitics of race to instructional interactions, youth also engaged in interpreting mathematics content in ways related to their experiences and environments. The daily schedule blocked two sections of "Team Time," during which TAs could work one-on-one with their students to review the material however they thought was best. During these sessions, nearly all of the students would work on

the board or seated directly next to their TA. On several occasions, I observed TAs, CIs, and grade-level supervisors using their debriefing times to brainstorm strategies for teaching certain concepts. For example, one TA shared that they felt unsure how to help their student understand multiplying fractions (without just memorizing a procedure). Other TAs offered some general strategies based on their own experiences, and then Jamal shared ways to use visuals to illustrate how multiplying and dividing with fractions are related. Involving youth in the brainstorming about ways to learn effectively elicited their personal experiences to use as a knowledge base for making connections to academic content (hooks, 1994). It also introduced the potential to acknowledge the competence of the TAs as knowers and doers of mathematics (Bartell, 2011). However, I observed that adults in the program often did not engage another layer in the substance of youths' sharing beyond the specifics of the mathematical topic: their experiential knowledge of being marginalized as Black and Latinx youth—and to some extent as Bengali Muslim youth—in mathematics education. This bounded engagement aligns with the program's focus on bounding care within the program such that students' own interpretations and meaning making outside of the program were not considered relevant to instruction. Consequently, bounding care in these ways precluded program support for practicing and building capacities for culturally relevant pedagogy. As Wilson et al. (2013) explained, transformative practice requires educators "serve children in a way that affirms them as whole, *social*, *emotional* and *cultural* beings" (p. 112, emphasis added). Overall, KMC's program staff maintained narrow and exclusionary attention to what environments, contexts, and identities were validated as salient in instructional interactions. In doing so, they also missed the myriad opportunities—the discretionary spaces—for disrupting dominant patterns of interpretation and interaction in instructional dynamics (Ball, 2017).

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, KMC was structured so that TAs attended each of the seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade foundations courses with their students. In these classes, I observed TAs offering more personalized and individual support to their paired students than the instructors. Instructors certainly engaged students individually, but they did so in the context of attending to the whole class. Critically, I observed that the personalized and individual support the TAs provided consistently facilitated students' participation in the larger class. For example, one day in a seventh-grade class I was observing, a substitute instructor called on a Latinx girl named Magali. In my previous observations of Magali in classrooms and other larger group situations, I had noted that she was painfully shy and averse to participating verbally in whole class discussions. The teacher asked, "Magali, what is a number between four-twelfths and eight-twelfths?" Magali's TA was sitting beside her, and Magali leaned over to her to quietly whisper, "Six-twelfths?" The TA nodded enthusiastically and Magali—still quietly and with a reluctant tone—offered her answer to the class and teacher. Several of the other kids in the classroom, the instructor, and Magali's TA all did the "celebrate/agree" hand motion, and I watched Magali smile widely at her TA. It seemed that Magali's public participation was significant, and having her TA there to provide reassurance was clearly meaningful.

As I noted in a previous section on instructional tasks and assessments, my observation data showed that some teachers incorporated group work much more in their instruction than others. Specifically, Ms. Bianchi included group work in one half of the lessons I observed in her classes, Dr. Jordan and Mr. James both included group work in about 80% of the lessons I observed in their classes, and Mr. Lowell included group work in less than 20% of the lessons I observed in his classes. I observed how the incorporation of group work and other structures supporting student participation in dialogue sometimes served to facilitate more meaningful

student-to-student interactions. For instance, in one of Mr. James' classes, I observed a Black seventh-grade boy, Sean, ask if he could come to the board to show his answer to a question. The teacher said yes, and Sean moved to the front of the room. I noted that while he was visually representing his work on the board, Sean asked his classmates, "Does this [visual] make sense? I hope you can see what I'm doing." Then, while he was explaining his answer, I saw Sean pause and look thoughtfully off to the side. He had realized he had made a mistake, but it did not seem like he knew yet what it was. Still, it was clear that he was thinking, and no one said anything; instead, I saw at least half of the class and the teacher start to make the "support" hand motion to show their encouragement. After a short time, Sean worked out his error and revised his explanation and visual representation. In this example, the teacher acknowledged Sean's competence as a learner and doer of mathematics by making space in his instruction to allow Sean to come to the board. Furthermore, the teacher and fellow students acknowledged Sean's competence by not intervening when Sean made an error and, instead, signaling their support for him to continue thinking and working. By giving Sean space to think through the mathematics, the teacher signaled his belief in Sean's ability. As Bartell (2011) described, acknowledging youths' competence, including by letting them make and troubleshoot mistakes on their own, is foundational to strong mathematics instruction. It is important to note that, as powerful as instances like this one were, they were relatively uncommon KMC's teacher-directed, procedurally-focused classes. Instead, these moments highlighted the potential for greater student-to-student interaction in KMC instruction.

One other interactional dynamic that demonstrated potential for more meaningful student involvement with each other and with their near-peer youth mentors was instructors' active involvement of the TAs and CIs in instruction. Again, instructors' involvement of TAs,

especially, was widely variable across classes and teachers. Furthermore, as Dr. Jordan's classes were not for younger kids, my observational data about classes that involved younger kids and TAs was more limited. Still, my data showed that some teachers were much more likely to actively involve TAs in seatwork and dialogue than others. For instance, Mr. James noticed that some students were inconsistently representing fractions, and so he went to the board and drew a sample representation. Then, he said, "Everybody, I want you to draw something like this. TAs, check that they're drawing the five number bars?" Then, TAs and students had time to work together on drawing representations of fractions. I observed that, in the time after James' clarifying instructions, at least three TAs were engaged in conversations with their students (and other students—I counted eight students overall). In those conversations, I heard students ask questions about the fraction bars (e.g., "so the big rectangle is 1?") and TAs offer questions and provide explanations and clarifications (e.g., "how would you show 5/5 on a fraction bar? … OK, so how would you show 7/5?). These conversations were instances of students and TAs interacting with the material and with each other based on their dynamic interpretations (Ball & Forzani, 2007). Interestingly, in this instance the TAs were working both as students (under the teacher's direction) and as instructors. Research about the instructional triangle has included careful attention to how students interact with one another and how students draw on their own mathematical sensemaking in these interactions (e.g., Ball, 2017), lending weight to the importance of these various layers of student-to-student engagement as important instructional interactions.

James also emphasized collaborative teaching in an activity where students would teach each other and teach their TAs. One day, I noted that he very explicitly gave the students a reminder of the purpose of the activity: "More than your answer, I want your neighbor and TA to

know *how* you got your answer." A CI for one of the eighth-grade teams visited James' seventh-grade foundations class one day. The CI noticed that some students were rounding decimals to the nearest tenth and then again to the nearest to whole (rather than rounding to the nearest whole directly). When the teacher paused, the CI asked from the back, "Hey, James, what if they rounded 3.49 to 3?" James picked up that question and used the opportunity to clarify rounding procedures. While these interactions did not transform the entirety of the mathematics content or instructional dynamic, they did introduce another mediation—another layer of interpretation and interaction—into the classroom (Ball, 2017). Without a realized critical care praxis, this additional layer of mediation and involvement did not transform mathematics instruction in the program. Those practices were undergirded by KMC's normatively white, individualistic, and paternal understandings of care, including a general inattention to how youth may practice caring agencies in culturally-relevant and -responsive ways by drawing upon their own cultural knowledges and lived experiences (DeNicolo et al., 2017). Researchers have demonstrated that a key *action* in critical care praxis is engaging youth as agents of critical care (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2005). These findings show that such engagement entails educators' skills and knowledge for noticing youths' caring agencies. As Sherin et al. (2011) detailed, noticing is a component of educators' expertise and involves educators' skills in filtering their attention—i.e., paying attention to some things and limiting their attention to others. So, noticing youths' culturally-relevant and -responsive caring agencies would require educators to develop and practice expert attention to culture and power. However, this did not happen in my study of KMC.

## Conclusion

Overall, data show that KMC's norms of care shared foundational assumptions and logics with the program's normative instructional practices and dynamics. Program leadership prioritized attention to interpersonal care and harm and did not prioritize attention to systemic operations of care and harm. With regards to mathematics instruction, these priorities related to program staff's low expectations for students, limited conceptual exploration, and compartmentalization of caring knowledge and mathematical knowledge. There were instances and individuals who notably diverged from these patterns, of course. However, general interactions and understandings of care and instruction in the program more often reflected a focus on individual relationships and responsibilities and color-blind universality vis-à-vis values for practicing care.

KMC's programmatic framing of care as a form of needs provision relied on "needs" being both individual and institutionally-determined. Similarly, instructional dynamics in KMC advanced teacher-directed pedagogies in close alignment with program-determined curriculum—two elements of instruction that prioritized organizational notions of children's mathematical needs over opportunities to support Detroit youths' already-existing brilliance (Leonard & Martin, 2013). My data showed that one KMC teacher, relative to her colleagues, advanced mathematical tasks and activities that were more oriented around student-to-student interaction and designed to elicit and acknowledge students' conceptual thinking. Still, all teachers and classroom contexts I observed in the program normatively advanced mathematical tasks that prioritized procedural teaching and learning and mainstream modes of assessment. Such standard mathematical practices in the program aligned with the program's abstract universalist and race-evasive ideas of caring. These notions of care informed the program's deficit-orientation toward

Detroit schools and children. Prioritizing procedural tasks and constraining students' exploration of mathematical concepts—including in relation to youths' lived experiences and sociopolitical contexts—reflected the program's investment in "gap-gazing" logics (Gutiérrez, 2013) that assumed *youth* needed transformation and not the systems and policies shaping their learning opportunities. The program also facilitated racist violence against youth by assuming individual and conflict-averse conceptions of care. These conceptions of care structured program dynamics in which a program co-founder and instructor issued racial microaggressions in classroom interactions. The idea that affective care is mutually exclusive with individual participation in racist systems ultimately mapped onto instructional dynamics wherein the provision of mathematical learning opportunities was equated with a demonstration of care—despite the oppressiveness built into those learning opportunities. At the same time, some teachers and students negotiated instructional dynamics in the program in ways that pointed toward the potential for involving youth in critical care praxis in instructional settings.

In the next chapter, I analyze the findings from this chapter and from Chapter 4 in order to place those findings in dialogue with existing scholarship on critical care praxis in education and the perils and possibilities for advancing social justice in community-based educational programs and in instructional interactions. Then, I share conclusions that offer possibilities for theoretical generalizations and detail implications for future scholarship and practice.

# Chapter VI

## Final Analysis

> "The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group; such contact between pupils, and between teacher and pupil, on the basis of perfect social equality, as will increase this sympathy and knowledge; facilities for education in equipment and housing, and the promotion of such extracurricular activities as will tend to induct the child into life."
>
> - W.E.B. Du Bois, 1935, p. 328

Nearly 75 years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) argued that proper education was humanizing education—and that such humanization occurs through relationships, through the provision of opportunities and resources, and through teachers' asset-based understandings of social, cultural, and historical contexts salient to their students' beings. Du Bois' explanation of "proper education" was in service of a larger point: that racial justice in education requires us to move beyond the canard of achieving equality by closing gaps—a standard that positions white ways of being and knowing as normative, and thus assigns them greater value. Given the imperative of decentering white ways of being and knowing, Du Bois' call for educational relationships to occur "on the basis of perfect social equality" provokes the questions: Who is determining what equality looks like between teachers and students? How is the actualization of such equality related to the local and systemic contexts of education?

This dissertation reflects my study of the sociopolitics of race, education, and care. Situating my study in the Kids Mathematics Coalition, a community-based education program in Detroit, I explored how theories and concepts of care are translated and negotiated in daily

educational interactions. Scholarship on community-based education programs has shown how these spaces can offer unique institutional and organizational contexts for negotiating the meanings and operations of care and racial equity in education. Scholarship has also documented that, despite their existence outside of school institutions, CBEs still exist within dominant power structures, including race, class, and gender. My review of scholarship on critical care praxis established the role of politically-engaged and ecologically-interactive care in advancing social justice in education. In particular, that scholarship pointed toward understanding knowledges and actions as part of the telescoping lens between macro-systems and individual experiences and local context. Scholarship on instructional interactions as sites for potentially disrupting dominant systems of privilege and oppression illustrated how KMC, as a mathematics program, held particular meaning as a site for investigating programmatic discourses and youths' negotiations of care, race, and power in education.

The purpose of this case study was to study the sociopolitics of care, race, and education in the context of a community-based mathematics program. Care—as a matter of interpersonal relations, but also as a resource and a politics—is one dimension in which we can observe the interactions between macro-level systems of privilege and oppression and the textures of our daily lives. By studying KMC, I have sought to better understand some of the ways that care, race, and education interacted with power and people's agencies in the program. Using critical ethnographic case study methodology, I engaged in participant-observation across the program's various activities for greater than 110 hours. I also interviewed 17 participants, including middle school and high school youth, college instructors (who were also program alum), and adult administrators in the program.

Analytical themes in my study relate to participants' descriptions of care in the program,

and how and to what ends they understood that care as operating in instruction in classrooms, in the program, and in their broader educational experiences. They also related to race, including themes of whiteness ideology, white normativity, and Black feminist notions of critical care. Themes also included common instructional arrangements that I cross-coded with care themes. As I detailed in Chapter 2, studying the sociopolitical dimensions of interactions between care, race, and education required a framework that included critical care theories about racial equity and liberatory practices, theories about community-based education programs as dialectical educational spaces, and theories of instruction and interpersonal interactions and interpretations that occur in teaching and learning. The study was organized around the following three research questions:

1. How do KMC participants conceive of care and how do the dominant operations and enactments of care in the program relate to issues of education and race?
2. How do KMC participants' conceptions of care relate to normative instructional practices and dynamics in the program, particularly those related to mathematics?
3. How do youth in KMC negotiate and make meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences?

In analyzing data to answer these questions, I connect patterns and themes related to building asset-based relationships, engaging deliberately and reflexively with sociopolitical contexts, the persistence of whiteness as a system of hierarchical valuation, colorblind racism, negotiations of power and race in instructional relationships and arrangements, and the situatedness of community-based education programs in larger educational politics and environments. In my analysis, I connect these themes to interpret the findings I shared in Chapters 4 and 5.

In Chapter 4, I detailed how KMC advanced a programmatic discourse of care as an individual relation or behavior, related to their use of race-evasive and abstractly universal rhetorics. Furthermore, I found that KMC encouraged a conception of the program as a bounded space, where individual care could flourish. An important complement of this finding was that, in asserting a boundary between KMC and the world outside KMC, the program treated experiences related to systemic oppressions as individual harms that were antithetical to the program's caring practices. Youth and adults in the program supported the idea that care was communicated through individual acceptance and affirmation and that self-expression was, to an extent, an important facet of caring. However, the way program participants interacted around individual acceptance and affirmation revealed problematic dynamics in which white adults veiled their racist behaviors in these rhetorics of care.

Also in Chapter 4, I shared findings about how youth made meaning about their experiences of care in education. I found that many youth associated care in education with material resources (including safety) and educational opportunities. Nearly all of the youth interpreted KMC's programmatic identity as a "caring" place. However, I found that some youth assessed KMC as caring in part based on their perceptions that KMC was compensating for deficiencies in their educational opportunities and experiences in schools. I also found that, for many youth, their experiences of care in KMC related to their peer interactions and feelings of belonging. Youths' experiences of individual care and their identification with the KMC were powerful in their personal feelings of support and growth, and so their participation in KMC was consistently present in their broader meaning-making about care in education. Furthermore, youth, student-staff, and alumni participation in the program (including, for some, participation that has lasted for nearly 20 years) demonstrated the program's successes in building a sense of

community and family as well as its enduring presence. The significance of individuals' positive appraisals of the program and the program's demonstrated commitment to sustaining a sense of community connection and culture sit alongside the power-laden discourses and ideals woven into programmatic conceptions of care and instruction.

In Chapter 5, I detailed findings about how the program's emphasis on individualized care, color-blind care, and maintaining white normativity related to instructional dynamics that constrained youths' conceptual engagements with mathematics. In particular, I found that the program's normative use of teacher-directed instruction, traditional Western mathematics, teacher-led assessment, and classroom tasks that promoted rote and procedural learning all contributed to racialized, deficit-based instruction. However, I also found some variation in teachers' use of these normative practices and some suggestions that youth mentors, in particular, participated in the instructional dynamic in ways that complicated—but did not mitigate—the racialized and deficit-based assumptions undergirding mathematics instruction in the program. Furthermore, in line with the program's normative conceptions of care, youth largely identified their mathematics instruction as caring. They related their instructional experiences to their value for mathematics as a resource (as property) and also by relating their experiences being affirmed or encouraged in mathematics contexts to other situations (particularly in schools) where they felt discouragement and a sense of failure at mathematics. In chapter, I analyze these findings in relation to scholarship and literature about critical care praxis, community-based education programs and contexts, and instructional opportunities for disrupting systems of domination.

### Rearticulating White Supremacy Under the Rhetorical Veil of Care

My study's first research question focused my investigation on how KMC participants

understood the relationships between care, race, and education in the program context. It also focused my study on uncovering how common enactments of care in the program interacted with sociopolitical issues of race and education. Data suggested that the program advanced an overarching conception that care is an individual response to others' perceived needs. In many ways, the program's attention to and validation of individuals' needs—including needs for belonging and community—powerfully influenced KMC participants' positive experiences and appraisals of the program. Participation in traditions and rituals, internal program norms and language, and the program's provision of generous time for community interaction across grade levels and roles all contributed to students' impressions of KMC as a fundamentally caring organization. Furthermore, youth and alumni participants communicated appreciation for KMC's explicit attention to youths' socio-emotional needs—including in ways that acknowledged their competence as *carers* as wells as people being *cared for*. In contrasting their experiences of KMC as a caring environment to their experiences of uncaring instruction and interactions in Detroit schools, the youth affirmed the significance of making care an explicit focus in an educational context. They also did so when contrasting KMC with their experiences with inequitable education policies and racialized discourses outside the program.

Youths' conception of KMC as a fundamentally caring place related to their experiences of individual care in the program. This association risked conflating the program's emphasis on interpersonal care with an assumption of the program's positive contribution to broader social change. That is, program leadership messaged that care is located individually rather than systemically, and built up the narrative of KMC as being uniquely suited to facilitate the teaching and modeling of care. From this perspective, care is an individual responsibility and creating communities of care is a matter of individual efforts rather than of policy. One of the program's

Teaching Assistants, Owen, reflected these conceptions when he told me:

> A lot of the teachers in DPS or the suburban schools...they just care about numbers and improving how the whole does, instead of caring about specific and certain kids and their respective weaknesses in areas. Like, I believe that nobody is necessarily stupid or smart, or whatever—it just depends on how much effort you put in and how much motivation you're backed up by. So that's why people [who] have a single parent home or a no parent home, stuff like that, they don't have as much support, so they don't do as good, because they don't have someone like helping them out, and telling them, 'you should do this, you should do this,' helping out with those life decisions and stuff. So, it's tough… And that's one thing that makes me nervous about when we [the program] expand to like all sorts of different places. It's hard to teach someone how to really care about somebody, so I feel like they're doing a good job. But it's hard to pass the torch, so to speak.

Owen's reflection speaks to the earnestness of his value for the program and the exigence he sees both for protecting the program and for expanding its reach. At the same time, his reflection captures the individualistic ideal that runs through much of KMC's caring discourses. Critics of white feminist care ethics have shown that individualistic and biological/instinctual notions of care strip care of its sociopolitical and systemic relevance (Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Thompson, 1998). One way to understand the persistence of KMC's prevailing conceptions of care, then, is to situate them in the gendered and raced politics of paternalism. Education scholarship about critical care has highlighted how dominant educational paradigms have often relied on and reinforced deficit-based views of Black and Latinx communities, and particularly those who are also living with poverty (Wilson, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Indeed, there is a long history of

white paternalistic, anti-Black, and nativist ideologies in U.S. education. These ideologies have promulgated racist discourses about Black families, including "controlling images" of Black women being inadequate carers for their children (Collins, 2000, p.84-86). Such scholarship helps us understand how KMC's ideas of care were aligned with such ideologies. If care in the KMC was a way to address deficits—the perceived educational needs (i.e., deficiencies) of Detroit youth of color—then that "care" may have actually stemmed from paternalistic assumptions about Detroit youth of color, their families, and communities. Furthermore, KMC also consistently framed care as an individual responsibility that could be nurtured or taught within the context of the program. As Rolón-Dow (2005) argued, the assumption that white educators and institutions are better-suited to provide care to youth and communities of color is deeply rooted in "racial/colonial oppression" and "white privilege" (p. 104).

Still, racist ideals and assumptions alone do not explain the persistence of KMC's caring discourses. Community-based education scholarship has illuminated how racist ideals and assumptions undergird neoliberal political and economic contexts that relate to educational "solutions" characterized by a focus on individual responsibility and inattention to political and economic systems that benefit from this focus (Baldridge, 2014; Dumas, 2016). Without KMC explicitly taking up or claiming such ideals, their focus on preserving an insulated community distinct from schools and other public systems articulated with this broader neoliberal policy context. These contexts have incentivized programs organized around individualistic and deficit-based narratives about communities of color. Kwon (2013) connected the persistence of deficit-based outside-of-school programs to a 1992 Carnegie Corporation report called *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*. According to Kwon, this report spurred a wave of philanthropic investment into community programs that explicitly focused on preventing

youth "crime and delinquency" and assumed a trickle-down effect, wherein participating youth were expected to influence their communities' sense of "self-responsibility" (p. 45). This paradigm of youth programming supported the proliferation of deficit-based, racialized and classed assumptions about communities' needs. Scholarship on neoliberal paternalism in youth-focused nonprofits helps situate KMC in the broader political economy of community-based education programs. With this perspective, we can more clearly identify how centuries-old racist ideologies are re-articulated in contemporary educational policy landscapes. Individualistic, deficit-based, and paternalistic notions of care are common threads between these articulations. Owen's mention that KMC's caring practices would benefit "people [who] have a single parent home or a no parent home" illustrates how KMC lack of engagement with systemic operations of care and neglect advanced ideals of "care" that actually asserted dominance. Furthermore, we should consider that youths' interpretations of care vis-à-vis KMC are part of the "environments" they interact with in their instructional interactions in schools. Engaging youths' learning and meaning-making about care involves opportunities for critical care praxis, with attention to how youth are interpreting care's relationship with social change.

Additionally, scholarship on critical care praxis in education has shown how knowledge about historical, sociocultural, and political contexts is integral to skillful caring action (Rolón-Dow, 2005). The discourse KMC advanced about being especially-equipped to facilitate caring relations relied on a narrative of individual harms. In this view, KMC could advance a conception of care that asserted distance between systemic racial privileges and oppressions and the program's responsibilities. Critical care scholarship thus allows us to understand that critical care in education involves more than positive emotions or intent and more than individual caring relations. Instead, critical care requires a commitment to advancing systemic equity and justice.

As Wilson et al. (2013) explained, the question is:

> Do white and other non-African American/Black educators believe in, care about, let alone love African American children enough to better facilitate their success when that means fighting to counteract some of the biased ideologies, practices, and systemic schooling conditions that limit them—dynamics even well-intended educational leaders can unwittingly perpetuate? (p. 124)

Put another way, individuals *do* have real needs and individual care *can* be personally meaningful, but critical care praxis involves seeking to transform the very systems causing harms in the first place. When Owen echoed program discourse in saying that he does not believe that anyone is necessarily smart or stupid, he was verbalizing a potentially asset-based perspective about learning. However, he also echoed the program's notion that treating everyone the same so that those "without" can join those "with" would solve inequality. This idea of equality echoes the "'gap-gazing' fetish" in education—and mathematics education, particularly—that is contingent on the acceptance of white achievement standards as the aspirational benchmark for youth of color (Gutiérrez, 2013).

Another way that KMC advanced a discourse of care in the program was through the association of material resources, including educational opportunities (real or perceived) and environmental safety. Relating care to safety and opportunity was part of KMC's discursive bounding of the program from the outside world. On the inside of that boundary were resources and safety and on the outside of that boundary were scarcity and violence. Chandira captured this idea of care when she told me:

> Kids *Mathematics* Coalition, a lot of people would think it's about the math. I did too. Even still when I was a TA, I was sitting in here and I'm like, 'You guys know it's

actually about the math?' You just never wanna let go of that aspect. But, as you keep listening, and really taking in what they're [program leadership] saying, it's not about the math. At all. Period. They could care less about the math. The math is a plus. I realize that KMC *is* math. How we're teaching the kids is so great. Imagine how they really feel about how to be as a person. The moral area of KMC. So that's what it's really about. To make sure kids are happy. 'Cause suicide rates are just going up. Make sure kids are happy, they're having fun, they're not wasting their summer doing things they shouldn't be doing, and taking the time out and actually growing morals, kind of. So it's more of, you know, how to talk to people...Maybe you're a little closed off. You learn that people aren't that scary. Getting over your fears. I would be scared to talk to people, but now I'm like, 'Here we are!' You know what I mean? It just opens you up to [the ideas that] the world isn't as bad as it seems to be. We all have that greatness inside of us. Because it's true. It's really sappy, but it's really true. We all have that greatness, you just have to bring it out. You just need that someone to bring that out from you. Because there was a journal topic that we had about the greatness in kids and why do we feel like kids are so great? It was a really good question. I thought it was because babies. We see babies as pure. As you grow up, you kind of lose that purity, because of media. I mean, everyone's desensitizing things now. Things you thought 50 years ago, like 'cursing: that's not good.' But now everyone's doing it. You hear it in all the songs. You just become desensitized of those types of things. But, if you have someone always bringing out that good in you, you'll leave the evil. You know what I mean?

Chandira's reflection on the program's normative notions of care—including greatness and innocence—highlights how youth in the program were personally motivated and inspired by the

notion of a community devoted to care. Moreover, as Chandira alluded to, that motivation and inspiration can be related to youths' observations and concerns about the world being an uncaring place.

At the same time, Chandira's explanation captured how KMC's programmatic framing of care wove together discourses about (a) safety and threat, (b) morality and immorality, and (c) positive, feel-good emotionality and interpersonal conflict. In many ways, the attention to interpersonal conflict as a site of rupture in caring is aligned with white feminist theories of care that position individual conflict as antithetical to justice (Thompson, 1998). These discourses were also reflected in how youth participants took up the dialectical bounding of care inside KMC and harm outside KMC. For instance, as I discussed in Chapter 4, some of the youth did express an appreciation for safety in the program in relation to particular harms they had experienced outside the program. Relatedly, both of the college instructors I interviewed reported that they thought the program was a safe place for youth in a way that contrasted the safety inside KMC to the danger outside KMC. Youths' meaning-making about the sociopolitical dimensions of care in these instances is significant and was included in my study's focus, but here I analyze how these discourses of care operated as parts of KMC's organizational identity.

I argue that KMC's organizational discourses of care were contingent upon an assumption of racial innocence. Critics of white feminist care theories have argued that white emotionality and care are often based on claims to racial innocence (Matias, 2016; Orozco, 2019; Thompson, 1998). Orozco explained that white innocence is "a mechanism through which dysconscious racism is communicated and maintained" (p. 430), such that white people assert domains of exemption from systemic racism. To create and sustain these domains, white people claim innocence by distorting or rejecting their accrued racial privileges—and their ongoing

responsibility. In the context of education, Matias and Zembylas (2014) situated white innocence as a component of a whiteness ideology that informs the dominant archetype of the caring, white, woman educator. They also argued that one function of whiteness ideology is perverting white people's emotions, triggered by racist assumptions, into expressions of positive affection. Chandira echoes the elision of morality into positive feelings when she says that the purpose of KMC is "about how to be as a person. The moral area of KMC.... To make sure kids are happy." With this lens, we can understand that KMC's consistent discursive framing of "the world inside" KMC and "the world outside" KMC asserts the program's racial innocence by preserving the perception of the program as being a place to feel good. Moreover, this bounding positioned KMC's organizational resources as unconnected from larger systemic racial injustices in schools, in mathematics education overall. Given scholarship demonstrating how individualistic and paternalistic notions of improvement and philanthropy have operated in CBE spaces to advance white supremacy, KMC's lack of reflexivity about its organizational identity and position in this broader politics is contradictory to critical care praxis (Kwon, 2013). There is real and important value in youth of color having a space that is affirming and protective, and to some extent KMC youth did feel that the program provided that. The crucial distinction is between critical care praxis and caring practices that are enmeshed with whiteness ideology—including the insular approach to program spaces and instruction. While the latter may feel good, interpersonally—which, again, *does* matter—it is necessary to acknowledge how such caring practices may be working against transformative justice. Practicing care individually is a necessary piece of critical care praxis—of building social coalitions—but sustained, collective, and material caring is required to achieve and maintain praxis (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Furthermore, critical mathematics education scholars would direct us to challenge any

attempts to separate KMC's identity as a mathematics education program from its claimed moral mission. Bullock and Meiners (2019) explained:

> If mathematics is both the fabric of the universe and a process of learning specific concepts that allow us to decipher order, those with mathematics knowledge are empowered to comprehend the world around them. Those without, on the other hand, remain subordinate objects of the world rather than agentic subjects. (p. 341)

In a world where mathematical knowledge is used to maintain social hierarchies, Bullock and Meiners (2019) and others have argued that increasing access and achievement are not truly aligned with advancing racial justice (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). Of course, racial justice is also not served by passively accepting the continued marginalization of children of color from mathematics learning. Instead, justice would require a much more foundational, transformative change, including reparations in mathematics education (Gholson & Robinson, 2019). This strand of critical mathematics education scholarship helps pinpoint that KMC's caring discourses included mathematics in ways that burnished the program's image of caring *and also* diminished the relevance of mathematics to care and morality by positioning math as incidental to its central mission. If mathematics were integrated into a program's commitments to justice, it would be more than "a plus" that "doesn't matter at all" in the program's offerings.

Theories of critical care stemming from Black radical thought and Black Feminist Thought assert the importance of working toward the aims of largescale social transformation and to caring for the *right now* of people's needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Kelly, 2002). Care can compel us to focus on the "right now" at the expense of future liberation, but critical care praxis requires alignment and dynamic movement between both. bell hooks (2004) captured this tenet when she wrote that "Love cannot exist in any relationship that is based on domination

and coercion" (p. 123). Furthermore, critical care praxis requires educators to interrogate their positionality within systems of domination. The interpersonal relationships between white educators and youth of color exist within the *preexisting* systemic relationship between white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Thus, if the relationships between white educators and youth of color do not reflect active challenge to dominating, oppressive, and coercive *systems*, those relationships do not represent critical care praxis.

KMC's resistance to interrogating the sociopolitical contexts of mathematics education relevant to Detroit youth was mirrored by their insistence that, to whatever extent care and race may be related, it was on a strictly individual level. Individual members of KMC communicated this notion in their difficulty squaring how a white person in the program could both express care to youth of color and reinforce patterns of white supremacy. One of the College Instructors, Maya, reflected this struggle when she described "race not mattering" to Cohen by saying:

> DC, ever since I met him, he's never been—As far as that conversation of diversity, it's almost not even a conversation for him. I've never heard him, like, out of his mouth, ever bring it up. For him, that does not matter. No matter what color, what size, what anything—he wants to help you and I've always loved and respected him for that. That specific thing about him, the fact that all he wants to do is help you, I've always respected that about him. His passion for helping children would exceed any other thought he could possibly ever have about race. Ever. So, even if he did think something, which I don't know—Even if he did have a personal opinion, you would never see it. You would never feel it. You would never hear it. You would never sense it. Because, all you could feel was—the only energy you really would ever get from him is all the energy he puts toward the kids. It like—it radiates from him. All he wants to do is be with these kids and love

> on these kids. That's it! So, yeah, he's definitely not one of those guys who uses or may even refer to or remind you of white privilege. He's not one of those people at all. For sure he's not.

Maya's explanation reflects the larger theme: KMC polarized discourses of individual care from discourses of racism. Wilson (2013) explained that individualistic notions of care can be considered "basic" rather than "transformative," and that such individualism "depoliticizes inequity and promotes a colorblind and culture-blind [environment] that perpetuates social division" (p. 66). From another perspective, individualistic notions of care politicize individual relationships to serve white ideological ends—including placing responsibility for social division on people trying to acknowledge systemic inequities. While critical care theorists have called for more attention to traditions of care not rooted in white supremacy (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Wilson, 2013), they have also illuminated how individualistic and "color-blind" notions of care are inherently political and necessarily center whiteness. To continually acknowledge this tension—decentering whiteness while continuing to interrogate whiteness—critical care scholars have pointed to the necessity of praxis. In particular, they have argued that sociocultural, historical, and political knowledges and knowledge of self (especially with regards to power and positionality) can join with actions that advance community-based justice and maintain practices of reflection, accountability, and repair (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Wilson, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013). With this understanding, we can see how KMC's lack of engagement with elements of critical praxis served to further disempower individual care and responsibility from playing any role in challenging systems of privilege and oppression.

One other normative conception of care in KMC was that caring for someone is congruent with accepting them, with affirmation, and encouraging their self-expression. This

concept included the program's focus on "greatness." Mahalia spoke to the relationship between care, acceptance, and greatness when she told me:

> The core values. It's like, PC and Mr. Lowell, say, 'It's so many of them! It's so many values!' It's really not! It's like, it's really like—I feel like it's so—they overstress, "KMC is so strict and love and careness." It is love and kindness, it's just showing people that they can be theirselves. That's like the most important thing, and that you *care* about them being themselves. And sometimes—no, you know what? It shows that you want them to be great. I feel like that's the best thing to describe it. KMC—one thing, you want them to be great. You want them to be—and your great can be kindness, it can be all sorts of things. I talked about this when I was writing my journal. It was like, greatness is not just standing or like, doing—running a mile or something. Because for some people, standing, or talking in front of room? That can be their greatness, because some people are afraid. Greatness for somebody could just be getting out the bed in the morning. Or just living their life. Just trying to be happy. Not doing something they'll regret. So many things describe greatness. Greatness is something that puts you out your comfort zone and which can also help other people. And yourself, you are people, so it can help yourself too.

As previously discussed, the idea of individual uniqueness and "greatness" is important in participants' meaning-making about educational care. Mahalia's discussion of greatness is an example of how youth sometimes revised the program's narrative of greatness in their personal interpretations. However, the program as a whole maintained a discourse of greatness that advanced the association of achievement, morality, and compliance. In Chapter 4, I shared how Lowell and Cohen, KMC's co-founders, spoke about greatness. Their language about

"greatness" being something kids can achieve through "hard work and dedication" and the insistence on using your individual greatness to "give back" reinscribed white paternalistic and achievement-oriented stances toward educational care. It also fundamentally relied on a subject-object understanding of care, in which one who has "become great" is positioned to give to those who are still developing their greatness. Moreover, the idea of someone "giving back" operates with the same neoliberal logics that have driven paternalistic dynamics in community-based education spaces. As Baldridge et al. (2017) explained, treating CBE youth programs as spaces for strictly personal empowerment and development—rather than as spaces related to systemic change—is a stance fueled by a value for "political individuality and the transference of social services to the private sector" (p. 396). There are political-economic implications of considering social relations to be purely individualized, including perpetuating deficit-based models of "improving" or "developing" youth of color through outside-of-school programs. These deficit-based relational models also align with deficit-based approaches to instruction, including mathematics education.

### To What Ends? Interrogating Power-full Care in Content & Instruction

My study's second research question focused my investigation on the relationships between KMC's organizational notions of care and the program's normative instructional practices and dynamics, particularly in mathematics contexts. Data suggested that the program's conceptions of care shared some foundational assumptions and logics with common instructional arrangements and interactions in the program. One of these common foundational assumptions was the idea that mathematics exists as an impersonal and objective body of knowledge (Hottinger, 2016). For instance, when I asked a Teaching Assistant, Chokri, about the values of KMC, he said:

> Loving, and like cherishing kids, students for who they are. Um, teaching them to be good human beings...A lot of people think Kids Math Coalition, oh *math*, but it's really not about math. We use math to build relationships and power. *Good* power—like not corrupt, evil power.

Just a few moments later, I asked Chokri to describe how his participation in KMC was related to his own educational goals. He said, "Just the basic boring education stuff, like studying habits and stuff. I would say it's been worse in KMC, because it's summer and Algebra II is something I really don't want to care about at home." Chokri was one of two interviewees who were the least enthusiastic about KMC, overall. However, other interview data showed that his framing of mathematics as a defined, apolitical body of knowledge—but one associated with status and power—was common among youth in the program. It echoed Chandira's discussion of mathematics in the program "not mattering," but being "a plus." The dual-narrative of mathematics represented in Chokri's explanation communicates some expectations for mathematics instructors. First, they should facilitate students' access to moral and political power ("good power") through mathematics. Second, mathematics itself is immutable, and so whether or not it is interesting or engaging is a matter of individual suitedness. I understand this dual-narrative as relating to some of KMC's ideas of care. In particular, I suggest that KMC's common instructional arrangements embody ideals related to understanding mathematics as property *and* ideals about care involving individual acceptance and affirmation.

First, I draw on scholarship that stems from Critical Race Theory about how whiteness functions as property (Annamma, 2015; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and relates to how the close association of whiteness with mathematical achievement has, in many ways, made mathematics a proxy for whiteness in property relations (Battey, 2013; Berry et al., 2014).

Harris (1993) defined how whiteness has operated as property in the United States, demonstrating how in the context of slavery, whiteness was *literally* property (i.e., whiteness was a material resource). However, she also detailed how "the modern concept of property focuses on its function and the social relations reflected therein" (p. 1728). For example, in a later piece, Harris (2020) provides the example of ZIP codes: originally developed as an organizational tool for mail delivery, they evolved into use in calculating insurance rates, mortgage rates and in signaling social status. Thus, where you live directly affects other economic and social realities. In education, Ladson-Billing and Tate (1995) explained that "curriculum represents a form of 'intellectual property'...that must be undergirded by 'real' property, that is, science labs, computers and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers" (p. 54). So, the systemic privileging of cultural beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and practices associated with whiteness is related to material resource distribution and generation. Together, these forms of property reinforce white supremacy in social relations. In mathematics education, Battey (2013) analyzed how mathematics curriculum "has been used to sort students, give access to college, and filter people into higher- and lower-wage work" (p. 332). Mathematics knowledge has a particular value, then, both in the context of gaining entry to the "higher" statuses and also as a *means* of doing the sorting (Bullock & Meiners, 2019). So, with the frame of mathematics as property, we can understand mathematics in KMCs in terms of *why* and in terms of *to what ends*.

KMC's understanding of care as a way to provide for youths' needs—as compensation for deficits—related to their instructional arrangements. I found that KMC classes most often relied on teacher-directed instruction, limited students' conceptual engagement and opportunities for dialogue, and limited students' participation in feedback and assessment. If mathematics is

property, then KMC practiced caring by granting access to mathematics—not by challenging its status or mechanisms re property. Second, I found that KMC also associated caring with positive feelings and affective expressions of praise. Thus, the program often communicated low expectations for student understanding and mathematical ability by affirming youths' participation without acknowledging their deeper sensemaking. In their most crystallized forms, these dual phenomena functioned to reinforce the perceived value of mathematics and to preclude youth from more meaningful and engaging mathematical learning. "Good power," in this case, meant helping some gain access to higher status (mathematical achievement) while encouraging others to feel good about not having higher status (personal affirmation).

These notions of care are related to Martin's (2007) critique of two dominant paradigms adopted by mathematics teachers of Black children: the "missionary" and the "cannibal" (p. 13). The missionary paradigm positions the teacher as one who "must save African American children from themselves and their culture" (p. 13); this paradigm is steeped in legacies of white paternalism. The cannibal paradigm positions the teacher as someone for whom "Teaching mathematics *content* becomes the primary focus, not teaching *children*" (p. 14). This paradigm excuses racial incompetence, bias, and avoidance as long as the teacher (of any gender identity) is sufficiently knowledgeable about math. In my findings about the relationships between care and instruction in KMC, instructional patterns like the prolific use of teacher-directed instruction and the heavy emphasis on learning "correct" procedures the "KMC way" sounded as echoes of the cannibal paradigm (Martin, 2007). However, constraining students' participation in conceptual exploration and having low expectations for their conceptual learning more closely echoed the missionary paradigm (Martin).

In some mathematics classrooms, I observed adult instructors perpetuate deficit-based

notions of youths' mathematical abilities and communicate normative assumptions about what mathematical learning looks like. Furthermore, instructors seemed to frame these interactions as functions of educational care. For instance, some instructors seemed to presume that the provision of more "advanced" content was an offering of care unto itself. However, even while providing advanced content may have diverged from systemic patterns of the exclusion and marginalization of Black, Latinx, and Bengali Muslim students in mathematics education, it was not equivalent to challenging the racial hierarchy of mathematics. Instead, the program persisted in performing access to conceptual mathematics without practicing instruction that supported youths' conceptual learning (Martin, 2009b).

For instance, Lowell's consistent use of rote recitation and memorization hindered rather than supported youth's conceptual learning. I posit that Lowell was sincere in his belief that offering students' access to the prestige of advanced mathematics and "a college-level proof" were meaningful ways to build their mathematical interest. I argue, however, that this kind of superficial inclusion of conceptual content in the instructional dynamic reinforced mathematics as a "white institutional space" by perpetuating "the historical construction of curricular models based upon the thinking of white elites" (Martin, 2013, p. 323). Allowing "access" to this curricular model—where Calculus is special, college-level math that requires institutional status and belonging—is a white paternalistic frame. I also argue that acknowledging kids' brilliance would involve engaging them in conceptual learning, not rote memorization. As Gholson & Wilke's (2017) explained, youth of color—and particularly youth racialized as Black and brown—are excluded from mathematics—both in terms of access, period, but also in terms of being able to access mathematics as their whole selves. Critical care praxis also emphasizes the necessity of recognizing students as whole people—anti-racist praxis that is antithetical to "the

(mis)taking of a child's mathematical identity" (p. 248).

Critical care scholarship invites us to consider the dynamics of care and instruction through the lens of praxis. Wilson (2016) explained that critical care involves intentional engagement with contexts of racism. Moreover, in order to effectively engage race as a power-laden social relation, Bartolomé and Macedo (1997) argued that "educators need to become 'cultural brokers'" who are prepared to help youth "deconstruct the web of ideological manipulation that makes the white cultural and ethnic group invisible and outside the realm of study" (p. 237). Even the mathematics instruction in KMC that was individually caring did not go so far as to involve youth in examining and decentering whiteness in mathematics—or in building relationships with mathematics that would promote radical healing (Gholson & Robinson, 2019). The work of enacting critical care in education requires constant reckoning not only with the social, political, and cultural contexts of the world outside of the school, but also with how those contexts have been institutionalized into the very operations of school itself—including interactions between youth, teachers, and content. Interpreting my findings about the relationships between KMC's common caring and instructional practices through the lens of critical care praxis also sheds light on how mathematics instruction in KMC interacted with larger ecologies of power and agency.

One particular pattern that emerged in my analysis of care and instruction in KMC was that the predominance of teacher-focused instruction limited or otherwise constrained the Teaching Assistants' involvement in instructional interactions. While I shared data showing how some teachers did facilitate TA-kid mathematical interactions, the bulk of my data showed that TAs did not play a central role in instruction in classrooms. However, I did find that youths' meaning-making about their own educational experiences played an important role in how they

considered care—both with regards to mathematics education and more general program participation.

### Negotiating Caring Agencies: Youths' Navigation of the Sociopolitics of Care

The third and final research question in my study of KMC focused my efforts on understanding how youth in KMC negotiated and made meaning about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences (broadly construed). Data showed that youth in KMC did engage in dialectical meaning-making between their perceptions of care in the program and their perceptions of care in schools. However, not all youth *verbalized* a sociopolitical analysis related to race and education in their meaning-making about care. Still, data showed that youth did *engage* the sociopolitical contexts of their experiences, both with regards to their understanding of youth participation in KMC and with regards to particular educational interactions. For instance, Marisha told me that being a kid in Detroit who valued education:

> means a lot of hard times that you have to—obstacles that you have to go through because, as far as Detroit kids, it could be like kids that don't have no home training, don't have parents there, or—For me, it's not the case, so I have to try to like, when those kids are having problems, have to try to step in, see if I can help. Talk to them or something like that. And actually, if I am having bad days, sometimes them kids can help me. 'Cause they could've been going through the same thing.

Marisha used a deficit-based stereotype of Detroit kids (which I interpreted as a racially-coded phrase for kids of color), naming personal and family challenges as obstacles to education. She first positioned herself as separate from "those kids," but then retracted the distance she had created by saying that, actually, the caring relationships she might have with them could be mutual. We can interpret Marisha's words with the lens of critical care praxis—with the

understanding that youth have agencies to practice critical care. This kind of interpretation highlights that, when Marisha considers general sociopolitical contexts of youth in Detroit valuing education, she names deficit-based "obstacles." However, when she recognizes her own agency to practice care, she begins to relate to the hypothetical kids in a different way—if she can care for them, then they, too, may be able to care for her. This issue of exercising individual agency in caring was also pertinent to Deon in his assessment of KMC. He said:

> KMC is like first class compared to school...At school, you would never get that kind of attention by a teacher. But here at KMC, you get that kind of attention by everybody. Like, you should really try your best to build a relationship with a teacher. But here at KMC, they build a relationship with you.

When I asked Deon why he thinks that difference existed between KMC and school, he said: "I would say the environment, but that really doesn't have nothing to do with it 'cause we're in classrooms which is just like school. So it might be the people here. It might just be the people here." Marisha and Deon both considered care as operating individually in some way and both maintained a value for how individual caring relationships could be meaningful supports and connections in an educational environment. However, while both youth named their value for individual care, neither expressed an opinion about care being relevant to relations of power, including race, gender, and class.

Critical care scholars have researched how youths' agentic participation in critical care praxis relates to their own political and ideological clarity as well as their knowledge and empowerment in working for social justice (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2010). Thus, we can understand youths' meaning-making about the sociopolitics of care in their educational experiences as reflecting actualized and possible opportunities for youths' critical caring. Deon

and Marisha's naming of individual care is necessarily related to their meaning-making about their sociopolitical contexts. In order to support youths' involvement in critical caring praxis, then, it is important to recognize the caring agencies that youth have and already exercise in their meaning-making. Furthermore, Ginwright (2010) explained that, while critical caring "moves beyond coping and survival," care itself can "build hope, political consciousness, and the willingness to act on behalf of the common good" (p. 56-57). It is important to recognize KMC youths' valuing of care—a not-yet-critical care, but care—were parts of their caring knowledges and agencies. A not-yet-critical care is something distinct from the insidious affected caring stemming from perverted expressions of white supremacy (Matias & Zembylas, 2014).

I also found that KMC understood care as an important factor in individual instructional relationships. For example, Maya told me that she was crying on the last day of camp in the first year of my study because:

> It was that feeling. I was so proud of them, and I—it was also a little bit of me being afraid for when they do go to school. You know, them telling me how the school system works for them now, how they feel like no one cares about them and how it's really just about getting the content through, like getting through the curriculum they were given. That scares me for my kids because I want the best for them and I know teaching takes love. It takes way more than just curriculum, way more than a worksheet, and so I just fear for them, but I know my kids are strong. And so I know they'll make it through anything. It's just like seeing them go is hard.

Maya's expression of care for the kids in her team was related to her concern for the *lack* of care they might receive in school. Again, while not verbalizing a racial analysis or speaking to her own racial or gender subjectivity, Maya did express her fear that the school system itself focused

on content at the expense of care. Additionally, Maya's assertion of the necessity of care was not based on assumptions about youths' inherent deficiencies or inadequacies. Instead, she situated the necessity in terms of wanting "the best for them" and not trusting that they would receive the best in schools. Through the lens of critical care praxis, Maya's assertion situates care and justice as being related to one another, at least at the individual level. This is further evidence of the notion that, for youth of color in KMC, the experiences of caring relationships they had with one another are knowledge resources for growing critical care knowledge and practicing skillful action.

Examining how youth made-meaning about care in their peer and near-peer relationships connects to critical care notions of belonging. DeNicolo et al. (2017) argued that critical care theory frames "belonging" differently than its predominant use in educational research as an element of youth psychology. In terms of critical care—including culturally-specific expressions of critical care[13]—DeNicolo et al. explained that "agency and social capital" play important roles in "conceptualizing belonging as a means of countering the policies and practices that perpetuate inequality" (p. 502). They also described how *not* belonging in schools is related to "the collective force of hegemonic ideologies, strategic actions, and unconscious perceptions and biases" that denigrate students' personhood and communities (p. 507). With this frame, we can acknowledge the complexity in KMC youths' meaning-making about care in instruction, as well as their firm assertions that KMC was a place they felt cared for. Specifically, we can consider how their practices of care in instructional contexts may reflect a counter-story of belonging. The program's facilitation of this context is a key resource for youth in authoring these counter-

[13]DeNicolo et al. (2017) related the concept of *cariño*, specific to the Latinx immigrant communities of their study, to broader theories of critical care

stories in community with others. For instance, Chandira told me that she thinks about her own schooling experiences when she considers how to support other youth in KMC. She said

> ...We learn to memorize, I feel like. [In some schools] they know what they're doing, and they're not just learning to memorize. Where like in DPS, I feel like...I'll memorize something just so I can get it right on the test. Or just so I can get an 'A' out of the class. Am I actually taking in this information? If somebody gave me a math problem like that, but it was incorporated into something else, would I be able to understand it? I honestly don't think so… I know how it is in school, so it's like, that pressure's on me now. Everything that I see wrong with DPS, I have to help them surpass that. You know what I mean? When they're going to be in high school, like my age, they're not like, 'Aw, I've been memorizing for so long and I don't know what to do.' That's why I won't help them. I will help them, but I'll make them do the problem first. Or, I'll change the problem every single time. I will never give them the same problem over again.

We can also understand KMC youths' expressions of care in instructional contexts through the lens of the instructional triangle and discretionary spaces (Ball, 2017). For instance, taking the example that Chandira provided about her own schooling experiences, we can understand that her interpretation and interaction of mathematics content was shaped by environmental and instructional interactions communicating the primacy of getting a good score over conceptual understanding. Using this same instructional lens allows us to understand two, co-equally important aspects of youths' participation in KMC instruction. First, we can understand that youth developed and made meaning about the relationships between care, instruction, and their own sociopolitical contexts even though the program actively avoided engaging sociopolitical issues or topics. Second, we can identify opportunities that KMC had—and largely did not

take—for supporting instead of constraining youths' caring agencies in instructional contexts.

An example of these two dynamics occurred in a debriefing meeting with the TAs and PAs matched with Bridge students (rising ninth-graders). As I observed this meeting, the following discussion occurred between three TAs (facilitated by Jamal Ocasio, the 9th Grade Supervisor):

Tyrell: My kid, I think she's gonna struggle on the post test, because she don't really got multiplication down and I don't really know how to teach that. Like, I memorized it when I was a kid. I don't really know how to teach her [inaudible] multiplication, 'cause she be guessing. And she'll guess, and I say great. So, I need help with that...

Jamal: Andria?

Andria: Oh. So you say you don't know how to teach the basic multiplication. Why don't you do, you know when you were little, you had those little multiplication sheets? Like the little 60-second ones? Give her those, consistently, so it reinforces.

Jamal: Kevin?

Kevin: Have you tried like 3 times 2 and then like the first number, add that two times?

In this exchange, Tyrell spoke to his knowledge of how his student was struggling with multiplication and frequently guessed answers. He *also* identified that he was taught to memorize multiplication as a kid, and now understood how that limited his ability to explain it to his student. Andria spoke to her knowledge of how multiplication is often taught in schools, with repetitive use of multiplication "times tables." While also an example of memorization, Andria's

participation demonstrated other youths' readiness to employ their caring agencies in content-specific ways. Lastly, Kevin suggested explaining multiplication in terms of addition. At that point, Jamal affirmed Kevin's suggestion, and the conversation moved on. This example allows us to understand how KMC facilitated, to an extent in alignment with its dominant conceptions of care and mathematics, youths' caring agencies in instruction. Ginwright (2010) and DeNicolo et al. (2017) detailed how peer networks can be supportive for kids' developing positive and identity-affirming connections in educational communities. My study of KMC shows how youths' caring networks can extend into interactions between students and content.

As important as recognizing youths' caring agencies as instructional resources is reckoning with how KMC constrained or otherwise manipulated youths' caring agencies through its perpetuation of individualistic and paternalistic notions of caring and dominant, ideologically white mathematics. Rolón-Dow (2005) explained:

> ...A major component of a critical care praxis is that it acknowledges the importance of addressing care at both the individual and institutional levels… Acts of caring offered by individual teachers or caring pedagogies enacted in individual classrooms are limited in their potential to transform education for students when they take place in an institutional context that does not explicitly and intentionally address the ways in which educational care is unequally distributed along racial/ethnic lines. While the caring practices of individual teachers offer seeds of hope for more substantive change, those committed to offering critical care must move outside their classroom doors to challenge educational practices, policies, and structures that work against educational justice for all students. (p. 107)

KMC, as a program, emphasized the significance of care at the individual level and the

organizational level—but not at the systemic level. Furthermore, by adhering to the abstractly liberal, power- and race-evasive framing of care, KMC simultaneously adopted a rhetoric of care and enacted an ideology of white domination. Kwon (2013) explained that, in dominant ideologies of community-based education spaces, "'Empowerment' operates...as a strategy of self-governance to make the powerless and politically apathetic act on their own behalf, but not necessarily to oppose the relations of power that made them powerless" (p. 11). I want to note that power, in Kwon's usage, is about formal institutional power. CBE scholarship and scholarship on critical care praxis has demonstrated how power can also be built in collective organizing and advocacy efforts (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Wilson, 2014, 2015). As an organization, KMC invested in rhetorics of care that did not readily convey the relations of domination from which they stemmed. In short, KMC's dominant epistemology of care ultimately informed their operating ethic of care. At the same time, youth in KMC demonstrated how their own epistemologies informed their value for practicing kid-to-kid care, showing how youths' caring agencies could potentially inform critical care praxis in education, including in the dynamics of instruction.

## Significance & Conclusion

Findings from this study of the sociopolitics of care, race, and education in a community-based education program contribute to our understanding about how care operates sociopolitically, across individual and systemic educational contexts. In our mainstream public and academic discourses—discourses that often reflect a worldview steeped in whiteness—we often identify what schools lack. Moreover, community-based education programs are positioned dialectically to schools. Some may assume that these organizations compensate for what they perceive as missing in schools: activities, mathematics, care. However, understanding how our

dominant narratives of care relate to paternalistic patterns of assigning need and assuming deficits challenges dominant assumptions about the role of care in education. Traditions of caring praxis borne by liberatory movements, often created and sustained by Black and Latinx feminists, challenge dominant, normatively white notions of care. The opposition of these caring paradigms—and the continued domination of one of them—is clear in KMC's operations. In order to advance critical care praxis in education, we must interrogate our understandings of care with a fundamental question in mind: *To what ends does care operate?* We can understand that care, conceived through a compensatory lens, becomes about making up for deficits, for closing gaps, and for encouraging positive feelings to displace any negative ones. However, critical care—care conceived through an asset-based and justice-focused lens—becomes about transforming social relationships, including those in schools. This kind of care praxis can ask the question, "What can care in education cultivate?" instead of the question, "What can care in education make up for?"

This study also yields practical conclusions for various educational stakeholders, including teachers and teacher educators, school leaders, and participants in community-based organizations and educational programs. First, we must consider critical care a professional competency for educators. Much like the pedagogical and content knowledge and professional skills that are much more commonly centered in teacher preparation, development, and support, critical care praxis involves patterns of knowledge and skills. These patterns, as well as the ability of professionals to grow and refine them, are central to the work of teaching. They should be studied as seriously as academic content knowledges.

Furthermore, as this study has demonstrated, professional caring practices are enmeshed with content knowledges. So, in addition to critical care being studied and practiced as seriously

as content knowledge, it must be studied interactively with content knowledge. There is much to learn about how care functions in instructional interactions and interpretations between learners, teachers, content, and environments. Moreover, this study has demonstrated how academic content—mathematics in this case—*is* sociopolitical. That is, it is created (and re-created) through interactions of individual agencies with systemic powers. Transforming content is not only accomplished by transforming curriculum, particularly in the micro-moments of instruction where teachers have the ability to acknowledge students' competence and to elevate their contributions to a discussion or other interaction—i.e., to influence their relationship with content. For example, Maloney & Matthews (2020) cited an example of a mathematics teacher's response to a student of color[14] who got an incorrect answer. The teacher said, "Remember you told me you didn't know how to do this? You did! It's your arithmetic you messed up! Two times six isn't fourteen, but you knew how to do the property which is what I was teaching, so you get it!" (p. 412). In this example, the teacher could have responded by focusing only on what the student did *not* know, and in doing so may well have reinforced racialized notions of mathematical achievement and ability. However, the teacher identified the student's mathematical understanding (and still instructively identified the student's partial error). In terms of the instructional triangle, educators (including teachers, family members, and CBE staff) can transform the meaning of content by focusing on transforming the ways that they and learners are interpreting and interacting with content and with one another around content.

Second, school stakeholders as well as community-based program participants and leaders must consider how care is part of their curriculum. This dissertation study has shown

[14] Maloney & Matthews (2020) noted that students in their study were Black and Latinx but did not name the racial identity of this particular student.

that, even when people are explicitly thinking of care as part of the content in their educational communities, their interactions can invoke notions of care that are ultimately harmful. Thus, considering care as part of content involves reckoning with people's multiple, dynamic, and evolving interpretations of care (or a lack of care). Such reckoning can happen in one-on-one interactions, such as family-teacher conferences. For instance, a teacher could explicitly ask parents and family members: "What would it look like for me to be a caring teacher to you and to your child?" They could also co-design a plan for communicating around these expectations across the school year. Teachers could also invite students to make explicit connections between their (mathematical) work and various dimensions of care (e.g., making care a criterion for evaluating and reflecting on "real world" applications of mathematics). In doing so, they could learn more about how students are understanding care, content, and their intersections.

Moreover, by articulating how care (including the *lack* of care) exists in current curricula, schools and community programs can begin to interrogate *whose* notion of care their curricula reflect. School leaders and teachers can ask students and parents how care operates in their school community. A mathematics project could involve asking students to design, administer, and analyze a survey about care or do a critical-care-focused analysis of the school, district, and/or state budget allocations and changes over time. Furthermore, educators can introduce "care" as a focus of their institutional evaluations. The underlying notion here is not to corporatize care—to make care *un*critical—but rather to name existing processes that schools and programs have for identifying, negotiating, and evaluating sociopolitical power and to inquire how those processes reinforce, disrupt, and/or provide opportunities for reimagining systems of care in the local- and macro-level landscapes. For CBEs and other community organizations, considering how the organization exists in an ecology of institutions and

communities is necessary to build organizational reflexivity and accountability. There are diverse fields of research and practice that explicitly engage and build knowledge to support this kind of organizational reflexivity and accountability (i.e., community organizing and activism) (see Baldridge, 2019; Scott, 2011; Watson, 2012), community action research-practice partnerships (see Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Guishard, 2009; Tuck, 2009), and family-school-community partnerships (see Pavlakis, 2018; Wilson, 2018; Yull et al., 2014). Educational leaders, practitioners, and researchers will benefit from examining their equity and justice work in trans-disciplinary and community-driven ways.

Third, this study highlights that attending to youths' learning and meaning-making about care provides opportunities for critical care praxis, with attention to how youth are interpreting care's relationship with social change. Just as youth enter academic spaces with important personal, cultural, and community knowledge that teachers can draw upon as resources or denigrate through a lack of recognition, youth enter educational spaces with personal, cultural, and community knowledge about care. To attend to the sociopolitics of care, race, and power in education and to do so in a way that builds critical care praxis, educators and stakeholders must seek to understand what it is that youth already know and believe about care and to engage that knowledge from a strengths-based position. For example, a common classroom activity is establishing norms. Teachers can organize norm activities and follow-up discussions and reflections around youths' articulations of values and practices of care (e.g., questions like, "How do these norms reflect and/or not reflect care for ourselves, one another, and for our communities?"). Such engagements would also include investment in school-family-community partnerships that could inform curricular, administrative, and instructional development in ways that could facilitate and support youths' critical caring agencies (Wilson, 2018).

This dissertation study presents several possibilities for further understanding how politics of care play out in community-based education programs—and particularly by those founded and/or designed by white people but situated in communities of color. First, there are few studies examining how different epistemologies of care operate in the same educational setting, within and between individuals' meaning-making and normative programmatic practices. As briefly discussed in Chapter 3, a limitation of my study is that it is missing youths' voices about their racial identities. In order to better understand how meaning-making and practices of care in education are informed by peoples' racial subjectivities, I identify this as an important area for future research. My hope is to further my study of how care is taught and practiced as knowledge by white educators. This study has illuminated some of the stakes for racial justice of white educators understanding the politics of care and race in their work with students of color. However, I believe the stakes for racial justice are also high in contexts where white educators are teaching white students. How white youth understand political dimensions to care, and how caring epistemologies (and thus ethics) are reproduced and challenged in their educational contexts, is of great interest to me as I consider what work I am particularly situated to undertake.

Youths' caring agencies deserve more study in education research. As we grow critical care praxis in education, we must pay particular attention to how praxis engages youth as agents of critical care. Included in that attention is a need to grapple with how dominant education paradigms can yield coercive caring environments, wherein youth are expected to affirm care in order to retain access to educational resources. Furthermore, to honor youths' existing knowledges and values for care, education scholars and practitioners must consider how facilitating their caring agencies is a part of professional practice. In order to disrupt systemic

injustices, care cannot operate incidentally—rather, it must be a deliberate and reflexive area of educational practice.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Youth Interview Protocol

**NOTE: The following questions are a list of questions that may be asked over 1-2 interview sessions. Given that the interviews will be semi-structured, that I will be collecting data from other sources, and that participants may have limited availability, I will not be asking each participant all listed questions.**

General background questions about Detroit and educational experiences

1. What school(s) do/did you attend?
    a. What community do you live in? How would you name your community(ies)?
2. How would you describe the quality of your education, overall?
    a. The quality of the schools in your community?
    b. The quality of education opportunities outside of schools?
3. What does it mean to you to be young person seeking education in Detroit?

General questions about KMC

4. How did you become involved with KMC?
5. How would describe the KMC community?
6. What does it mean to be a member of the KMC community?
    a. Have you experienced any privilege or other positive benefit by being a member of KMC?
    b. Have you experienced any challenges that have come with being a member of KMC?

Thoughts on norms, ethics, and pedagogies

7. In KMC, what does it look like/mean for you to *care* about other people?
8. In KMC, what does it look like/mean when other people care about you?
    a. How does this compare to the care you feel in schools? Why do you think it is different or similar?
9. How do KMC leaders see you as a learner?
    a. How do they communicate their opinions of you as a learner?
10. How do your KMC peers see you as a learner?
    a. How do they communicate their opinions of you as a learner?
11. How are you a teacher or leader in KMC?
    a. How do others in KMC see you as a teacher/leader? How do they communicate this to you?
12. Can you give an example of a time when you felt deeply supported in learning at KMC?
13. What kind of knowledge is valued at KMC?
14. What kind of thinking is valued at KMC?
15. Describe a time when you made a mistake at KMC. What happened? What were your interactions with others about that mistake?
16. Have you experienced *love* in KMC? (Of self? Of others?) If so, please describe. If not, why do you think you haven't experienced that?
    a. Have you experienced in school? If so, please describe. If not, why do you think you haven't experienced that?
17. What are your responsibilities to other people in KMC? To other students? To teachers? To alum? To yourself?

KMC within educational experience

18. Describe how KMC has or has not influenced your personal goals? Your educational goals?
19. Describe a time you felt like your involvement in KMC related in any way to your life outside of KMC.
20. Anything else you would like to share about anything related to education in Detroit, your experience in KMC, or your experiences in schools?

**** Thank you so much for your time! I really appreciate it! Feel free to let me know if you ever want to share anything else or have questions about our study. ****

Appendix B: Adult Interview Protocol

**NOTE: The following questions are a list of questions that may be asked over 1-2 interview sessions. Given that the interviews will be semi-structured, that I will be collecting data from other sources, and that participants may have limited availability, I will not be asking each participant all listed questions.**

General background questions about Detroit and youth educational experiences

1. What is your understanding of the educational landscape in Detroit?
    a. How do you see your role within that educational landscape?
2. Do you see KMC relating to any larger systems of inequity (e.g. race or socioeconomic status) in Detroit?
    a. Is this relationship made explicit in any way? If so, how? If not, why?
3. How do you understand the broader educational needs of youth who attend KMC? (Education here can be broadly understood, to include relationships, resources, and other elements that may relate back to education somehow)

General questions about KMC

1. What is the driving mission of KMC?
    a. Who does KMC serve?
2. How did you become involved with KMC?
3. How would describe the KMC community?
4. What does it mean to be a member of the KMC community?

a. Can you give an example of a privilege or other positive benefit of being a member of KMC?
b. Can you give an example of a challenge that comes with being a member of KMC?

Thoughts on norms, ethics, and pedagogies

5. What are the core values of the KMC community?
6. Have you experienced or been part of caring relationships in KMC? (Describe)
7. (If so) In KMC, what does it look like/mean for you to *care* about other people?
    a. In KMC, what does it look like/mean when people care about each other?
    b. How does this compare to the care you think students receive and are taught to practice in schools? Why do you think it is different or similar?
8. What are your pedagogical beliefs and practices about teaching and learning?
    a. How have these been influenced by participation in the KMC program?
9. What are your ethical beliefs about teaching and learning?
    a. How have these been influenced by participation in the KMC program?
10. What are the "norms" or typical traits of KMC relationships? How have these developed/been formed/maintained?
    a. What happens when a student acts outside these norms?
    b. What happens when an adult acts outside these norms?
11. What kinds of knowledge are valued in KMC?
    a. What kind of thinking is valued at KMC?
12. Describe an instance of significant learning for you as a member of the KMC community.
13. Do you think anything related to race matters in KMC? If so, how?

14. Have you experienced *love* in KMC? Of self? Of others? Describe a time when you experienced love in KMC.
    a. Have you experienced something like this in other educational settings? If so, please describe. If not, why do you think you haven't experienced that?
15. What are your responsibilities to other people in KMC? To students? To teachers? To alum? To yourself?

<u>KMC' personal influence</u>

16. Do you think there is anything that educators in Detroit schools could learn from KMC?
17. Do you think there is anything that educators at KMC can learn from educators in Detroit schools?
18. Do you think the race of KMC teachers' assistants, college instructors, and leaders matters? If so, how?
19. Describe a time you felt like your involvement in KMC had a significant impact on your life outside of KMC.
20. Anything else you would like to share about anything related to education in Detroit, your experience in KMC, or your experiences in schools?

**** Thank you so much for your time! I really appreciate it! Feel free to let me know if you ever want to share anything else or have questions about our study. ****

## Appendix C: Sample Data Summary Table

The table below is one example of the data summary tables I completed related to each theme to ensure analytical integrity (i.e., being sure I could contextualize the representativeness of particular themes). The table below shows the thematic coding summary for themes related to "emotional safety" in the interview, which were collapsed into higher-level thematic codes representing participants' positive appraisals of care vis-à-vis (a) individual acceptance, (b) positive expression or experience of racial identity, (c) meaning-making about KMC adults' care for children.

| Role | Participant | Thematic elements of emotional "well-being" (appraisals) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Personal support, kindness** | **Proactive attunement to emotions, experiences** | **Opportunities for self-expression** | **Trust, responsibility, and autonomy** |
| 7 | Hailey Sanders | x | | | x |
| 7 | Raven Anderson | x | x | x | |
| 8 | Basirah Wasim | x | x | | |
| 8 | Zacarias Carrera | x | | x | x |
| 8 | Carlotta Thompson | x | x | x | x |
| 8 | Marisha Kidd | x | x | x | x |
| 8 | Deon Barney | x | x | | |
| 9 | Jordan Cummings | x* | | | |
| | "Kids" Total | 8 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| | Percent of "Kids" | 100% | 62.5% | 50% | 50% |
| TA | Chandira Nazmul | x | x | x | x |
| TA | Chokri Amin | x | | x | x |
| TA | Mahalia King | x | | x | x |
| TA | Owen Danjuma | x | x | x | x |
| | TAs Total | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| | Percent of TAs | 100% | 50% | 100% | 100% |
| CI | Marcel Johnson | x | x | x | x |
| CI | Maya Lawson | x | x | x | x |
| SS | Jamal Ocasio | x | | x | x |
| SS | Alyssa Brown | x | | x | |
| SS | Bob Lowell | x | x | x | x |
| | Senior Staff Total | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| | Percent of Senior Staff | 100% | 60% | 100% | 80% |
| | **TOTAL** | 17 | 10 | 13 | 12 |
| | **PERCENT** | 100% | 59% | 76% | 71% |

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